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ABSTRACT

This volume contains 16 essays on Further Education (FE) in the context of its changing status and role in the educational and economic life of Great Britain. The essays are grouped around four main themes: (1) FE and mission; (2) managerial responsibilities; (3) context; and (4) diversity. The essays are: "FE Makes Itself Indispensable" (Tony Robinson); "FE-All Dressed Up, but Does It Know Where To Go?" (Chris Hughes); "Quality-Beyond Systems" (David Toeman); "A Taste of Conscription--Looking Back at Entitlement" (Ruth Silver and Adrian Perry); "Towards a Credit Culture in Further Education" (Peter Wilson); "Devising a New Funding Methodology for Further Education--The Funding Learning Approach" (Richard Gorringe); "Colleges and Companies" (Andrea Spurling); "Equal Opportunities and Further Education" (Keith Wymer); "The American Community College and Its Links with Industry" (Patsy Fulton); "Urban Colleges--Success against All Odds" (Annette Zera); "Rural Colleges" (Bill Bleazard); "A New Era for Scottish Colleges" (Michael Taylor); "Human Resource Strategies in the New FE" (Kate Anderson); "Incorporation and the Sixth Form Colleges" (Geoff Higgins); and "Conclusions (Michael Austin). An appendix provides a key_to acronyms. Includes an index. Many papers contain references. (JB)

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Further

Essays in further education

Editors:
Colin Flint
Michael Austin

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Essays in further education

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in association with
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Foreword

Colin Flint
Michael Austin

This is not intended to be a comprehensive account of all that is going on in the nation's further education colleges. It is, rather, a series of snapshots of some of the preoccupations, achievements, hopes (and fears) of FE as it comes to terms with its new role in the educational and economic life of Britain.

The authors of these essays share a commitment to the sector, believing that it has earned the chance to demonstrate its crucial importance in reshaping the post-compulsory education system – a system that has never served the needs of the majority of school leavers and adult returners well enough. The belated recognition that the structures of the past will not serve the needs of the future has brought FE to the fore after decades of (more or less benign) neglect.

The demands now made on it are considerable and the challenges great. The requirement to achieve 25 per cent growth in the three years following incorporation is daunting, given the economic context in which we are operating and the industrial relations battles we face. In addition there are the serious inconsistencies of government policies which penalise many students who wish to learn and undermine our attempts by capricious activities elsewhere in education and training.

Still, having wanted for so long to see FE brought centre-stage, we must not complain if occasionally we bump into the furniture and the audience has not yet given us a standing ovation. If we don't forget our lines, and go on doing the business as far as four million students are concerned, we'll soon be winning all the Oscars.

The essays are grouped – very broadly – round four main themes: FE and mission; managerial responsibilities; context; diversity. Other editors would have different contributions and some would have different priorities, but further education is an inexhaustible subject.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Colin Flint
Principal
Solihull College

As those who are most likely to read this book will know, there has been a lot going on in further education in recent years. Many of those who will **not** read it may know that there has been a great deal of change taking place in education as a whole, but most of them will not know much about FE. Herein lies a problem. FE is only centre-stage for those who have bought tickets for the show: for the rest we are still way out there on the edge of the Fringe. Will we ever reach London's West End? Will television make sit-coms out of us? Will we ever play the Hollywood Bowl?

The history of technical and further education in Britain is also a history of our class system, just as an analysis of the structures and users of our present educational provision reveals the extent of the tenacity and hardiness of that system. We do not need to go back to the Mechanics Institutes and the day extension classes to remind ourselves of the magnitude of our task; those of us working in colleges have lived with it throughout our careers.

In 1970 a good college principal and lovely man named Adrian Bristow wrote a book called **Inside the colleges of further education**, commissioned by the DES. It was probably the first – and certainly the most engaging – attempt to do what we are still doing: trying to change the image of our work in the public consciousness. His optimism that the new dawn had come, that the clouds of grime and depression associated with earlier generations of technical education (clogs and flat caps and black pudding and 'night school') had passed away, shines through the book. After all, we'd lived through the sixties, through Harold Wilson's 'white-hot heat of the technological revolution'.

The colleges had expanded dramatically, and had now attracted very large numbers of full-time students, at least half of them female. There were degree and sub-degree courses in many of the larger colleges. There was, surely, a new understanding about the importance of technical and vocational education, about the need for higher levels of knowledge and skills in the workforce of the future, for retraining of those already in work, about the links between educational achievement and economic development and national well-being.

Well, up to a point, because to some considerable extent that's where we still are. There is still no proper understanding of what the colleges do; still no widespread awareness of the importance of much higher levels of participation and achievement; and still, when it gets close to home, not much evidence that many are motivated by the concept of education as public good. FE is comprehensive; it caters for all, regardless of social class, as well as for all ages, abilities and aptitudes. Yet in most of Britain it is likely to be seen as catering for the less able.

The real point here is that despite all the developments that have taken place in the further education system in the last 20 years, despite all the legislative changes which have affected our work and our customers, and despite the continued slippage in Britain's performance against international competition, we are still in essentially the same place as we were when Adrian Bristow was writing his cheerful and cautiously optimistic book. In that we have failed to make essential change in the public perception of our work, we have in some respects gone backwards.

Perhaps – and this introduces a more positive note into the subject – the 1990s equivalent of the DES's commissioning a book to look into further education colleges has been the establishment of the Further Education Funding Council. We're in a bigger league here, of course, which is a recognition of the importance of the undertaking. As sustained progress in the redefinition of the post-compulsory education system did not occur in the seventies and eighties, due in very large measure to governmental failures and inconsistencies, and to ideological black holes, the task is now both bigger and more critical.

If the Macfarlane proposals for the widespread introduction of the tertiary model in 1980 had not struck the reef of Thatcherite dogma, then the academic/vocational divide would not continue to have such a damaging effect on our education systems, A levels would not still be distorting the entire structure, and – probably – there would have been significant improvement in participation rates and levels of achievement.

Mrs Thatcher's much vaunted radicalism fell some way short of recognising that a system that might have been appropriate (though I doubt it) for Grantham Girls' School in the war years was very largely inappropriate for the needs of the nation as it approached the 21st century. I remember watching her discomfiture at the awards ceremony for the 1988 Skills Olympics, held that year at the NEC. The gold medals went to Korea (11), Taiwan (7), Austria (5), Switzerland (4), Japan (3), Germany (3). Britain took just one – for men's hairdressing. Neither then nor at any time subsequently did Mrs Thatcher show any sign that she had made the obvious connection. It wasn't only the hapless Macfarlane: the major piece of work done by Higginson and his committee was just as speedily binned.

It is worth pursuing the point touched on above about education and social class, because it is at the heart of our problem. For too many in our society, be they politicians, business leaders, school teachers or parents, 'technical education' implies lower ability, lower esteem, lower pay. It is for those not deemed clever enough to benefit from academic study. It is for plumbers and pastry cooks (begging their pardon). Nine out of ten of those who hold such views, in whole or in part, would deny it as absurd. But by their deeds shall ye know them. We are in a vicious circle akin to Sir Christopher Ball's low skills economy (described in **More means different**, 1990): this one condemns us to a perpetuation of mythologies about low esteem and low worth, unless it is vigorously and consistently challenged.

It has been pointed out that over two-thirds of the take-up of full-time higher education is from social classes I and II, although they constitute only one-third of the population. **Figures 1** and **2** are taken from the PCAS **Annual report 1991/92**, and show UK applications and admissions; **Figure 3** gives the percentages of applications against total applications, and the approximate percentages of the designated class as a proportion of the whole.

Figure 1: Institution type attended – educational qualifications and social class

APPLICANTS

	GCE A/AS Levels					
Type of institution	**I**	**II**	**IIIN**	**IIIM**	**IV**	**V**
Maintained sector						
Grammar/technical	1,758	5,279	1,589	1,773	669	148
Sixth form college	2,811	8,574	2,456	3,788	1,723	420
Comprehensive	7,701	24,141	6,746	10,506	4,318	879
Other	109	536	121	251	100	29
Sub-total	12,379	38,530	10,912	16,318	6,810	1,476
Independent	4,586	8,915	1,584	1,112	512	53
F and HE	4,163	13,164	4,434	6,258	2,957	764
Total	21,128	60,609	16,930	23,688	10,279	2,293
Not classified	4,328	12,363	3,776	4,480	2,121	500
Total applicants	25,456	72,972	20,706	28,168	12,400	2,793

	BTEC/SCOTVEC etc.					
Type of institution	**I**	**II**	**IIIN**	**IIIM**	**IV**	**V**
Maintained sector						
Grammar/technical	2	23	3	12	1	–
Sixth form college	12	49	12	34	16	4
Comprehensive	49	187	54	126	50	9
Other	1	12	2	5	1	–
Sub-total	64	271	71	177	68	13
Independent	6	33	6	3	3	–
F and HE	2,105	8,326	2,884	5,461	2,587	798
Total	2,175	8,630	2,961	5,641	2,658	811
Not classified	1,313	4,406	1,592	2,447	1,264	309
Total applicants	3,488	13,036	4,553	8,088	3,922	1,120

Figure 2: Institution type attended – educational qualifications and social class

ADMISSIONS

	GCE A/AS Levels					
Type of institution	**I**	**II**	**IIIN**	**IIIM**	**IV**	**V**
Maintained sector						
Grammar/technical	404	1,317	394	450	171	36
Sixth form college	866	2,848	880	1,310	599	127
Comprehensive	2,281	7,834	2,326	3,567	1,457	282
Other	25	132	40	64	23	7
Sub total	3,576	12,131	3,640	5,391	2,250	452
Independent	1,020	2,173	389	285	127	12
F and HE	1,539	4,892	1,644	2,418	1,145	328
Total	6,135	19,196	5,673	8,094	3,522	792
Not classified	1,772	5,043	1,563	1,962	877	203
Total admissions	7,907	24,239	7,236	10,056	4,399	995

	BTEC/SCOTVEC etc.					
Type of institution	**I**	**II**	**IIIN**	**IIIM**	**IV**	**V**
Maintained sector						
Grammar/technical	–	7	–	3	–	–
Sixth form college	2	9	4	1	5	1
Comprehensive	19	47	17	22	12	–
Other	–	4	–	1	–	–
Sub-total	21	67	21	27	17	1
Independent	–	5	3	2	–	–
F and HE	665	2,464	893	1,659	815	248
Total	686	2,536	917	1,688	832	249
Not classified	471	1,490	514	856	424	93
Total admissions	1,157	4,026	1,431	2,544	1,256	342

Figure 3: Percentages of applications from socio-economic groups

	I	II	IIIN	IIIM	IV	V
% of class in population	6	29	23	22	14	6
% of total applications (A levels etc.)	15.7	44.9	12.7	17.3	7.6	1.7
% of total applications (BTEC etc.)	10.2	38.1	13.3	23.6	11.5	3.3

The social classifications are the standard ones:

I	(A)	Professional occupations
II	(B)	Intermediate occupations
IIIN	(C1)	Skilled occupations – non-manual
IIIM	(C2)	Skilled occupations – manual
IV	(D)	Partly skilled occupations
V	(E)	Unskilled occupations

[NB: See also the bar-charts in chapter 8 for further statistical evidence.]

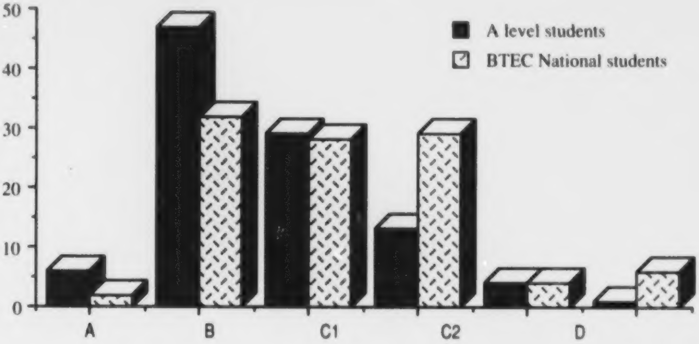
The recent report by The Staff College, **Towards parity of esteem?** (Davies 1993), highlighted the clear effects of social class on educational choice at 16: 'BTEC National students were found to be .... less likely (than A level students) to be drawn from socio-economic groups A and B and they demonstrated more modest aspirations for their eventual qualifications levels'. **Figure 4** is drawn from the report.

The classless society is as far away as it ever was, in terms of genuine educational opportunity. An Oxford don (one we should cherish) wrote to the National Commission on Education, as it started its work, something to the effect that, 'unless you tackle the fundamental inequalities of British society, and seek to sweep away a system by which excellence for the few is bought at the price of mediocrity for the many, you are wasting your time. The failure of British education lies in the over-emphasis on class and privilege'.

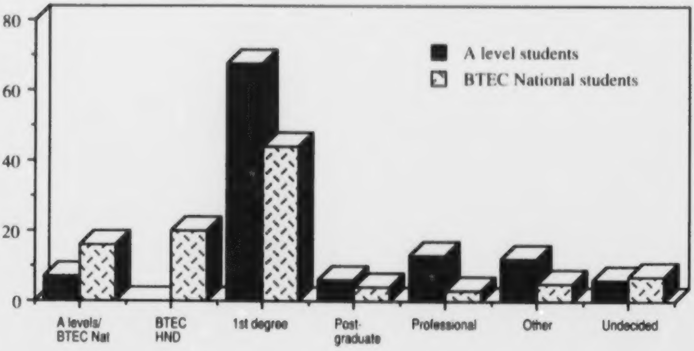
So how should we break out of the low skills equilibrium that David Finegold, Sir Christopher Ball and many others have described so well? Finegold, in his briefing paper for the National Commission on Education (1992) argued that we should dispel popular myths about our failings, such as its being the education and training system that is to blame, or that British attitudes militate against participation

Figure 4: Choice of qualification by social class and educational aspiration

A. Choice of qualification by social class (per cent of each qualification). Social grade based on occupation of father.



B. Choice of qualification by educational aspirations (per cent of each qualification).



Source: Davies (1993) Towards parity of esteem? **Mendip Paper 055**. The Staff College in education and training. Even more dangerous, perhaps, is the myth that we have now solved our problems because participation rates amongst school leavers have increased, and more students are going into higher education. But the rate of participation falls off markedly after one year of post-compulsory education, and far too many students are still pursuing the wrong sorts of courses and qualifications. It is still the case that Britain, almost alone amongst advanced industrialised countries, allows 16 year olds to take employment with no continuing education and training as a right. There is no indication that when the recession does finally end, large numbers of school leavers will not take the easy and seductive option of relatively well-paid employment, with or without further training.

Some of Finegold's recommendations in **NCE Briefing 5** for government measures to stimulate supply and demand for skills training are listed below. They are radical and not at all in line with the reliance on the market so close to the hearts of our present political masters. However, something like them – especially numbers 1 and 3 – will soon be the only way we will have of getting near the National Targets for Education and Training set by the government.

1 Legislate to remove all 16–18 year olds from the adult labour market. Instead, they should either:

   a) continue in full-time education, or

   b) enter a formal traineeship with an employer, where they will be released two days a week (or the equivalent in blocks of time) to train for a qualification up to NVQ level III. The employer pays an allowance of roughly a third of the adult wage. Off-the-job further education is paid for by the state.

2 Abolish the examination at 16-plus. With the national curriculum, testing at key stage 4 and the moves to encourage young people to go on learning until at least 18, age-linked examinations are becoming an anachronism.

3 Reform the financing of higher education to open up opportunities to all adults. Give adults an entitlement – equivalent to £1000 a year for three years – to be applied towards the cost of education at any time in their working lives. Those who choose to follow a full-time degree course would repay the additional cost through a graduate tax system.

4 Measure the performance of education and training providers and TECs in terms of value added. The use of single outcomes takes no account of the quality of intakes.

5 Require public companies to report what they spend on education and training in their annual reports. Companies should have to follow accounting conventions in arriving at their figures.

There are many other voices supporting the case for policy changes to improve education and training in the post-compulsory sector. NTETs came originally from the CBI, and were adapted by the government. Howard Davies, Director General of the CBI, has reinforced the necessity of achieving them by pointing out that Britain came 20th (out of 22) in a World Economic Forum report on the quality of skills held by people in the workplace. He has said that it is difficult to believe that a governmental structure in which the responsibility for training is kept separate from that for education is the best model available. We in further education have been saying this for a very long time: one hopes that Howard Davies and Geoffrey Holland (now, alas, no longer directly engaged in the battle) between them might have more success.

It is not by any means the only reform which is necessary. The third major department of state that needs to be brought into the equation is that of social security. As far as the achievement of virtually universally approved targets is concerned, the benefit rules are simply perverse. They are preventing thousands of students – probably thousands in every college – from taking full advantage of what we offer, of what we are being urged to offer by other parts of the system. We are locked into another spiral of the same vicious circles: until better financial support by benefit payment, or grants, or vouchers is available to most would-be adult students, they will not return to education. If they do not return to education they will not gain any, or better, qualifications. If they do not get high levels of skills and qualifications they will not make their contribution to the workforce and a healthier and more competitive economy; and if they do not do that, there will be no money to pay for educational support. Sorry to labour the point, but we need to go on saying it.

Other parts of the current arrangements that betray the absence of coherent strategies and policy are entirely the province of the DfE. You don't have to worry about another department in order to cause yourself problems, you just introduce policies for schools – CTCs and sixth forms in grant-maintained schools – which make it more difficult to achieve the real objectives. We do **not** need more sixth forms, except in very particular circumstances, and we most certainly do not need more students doing inappropriate A level examinations as even the headmasters' conference agreed at its meeting in September 1993. Their chair put it crisply: 'What I do question is whether the A level system properly serves those who use it, even the most able.'

What we **do** need is effective incentives for further learning for all young people, and for older students who have failed or been failed by the system in the past. The academically successful have done well enough. We should now be aiming much wider. We have to change from an education system that has been avowedly, even proudly, élitist to one that is determinedly egalitarian in that it sets out to make opportunity equally available to all. We need both quantity and quality. We need further education.

Currently, we are being given much assistance in making our case. We have just seen the report from the Council for Industry and Higher Education on **Changing colleges: further education in the marketplace** (1993). That Alan Smithers and Pamela Robinson should be commissioned to undertake this mapping study of FE is good news in itself, that the DTI (and Unilever) should fund it is also encouraging. Best of all is the fact that it is an excellent report which shows enthusiasm for its subject and a real understanding of its importance. One hopes that it will be carefully read in boardrooms, in university common rooms and in schools because, in the words of the report:

> The Council believes that the colleges, the scale and variety of their work and what must now be asked of them, are, to say the least, far from properly understood in the country at large. Nor are they understood by those in industry responsible for policy-making and for representing views on priorities for education and public spending ...
>
> It is on the colleges that the country now **primarily** relies to develop practical employment-related education and offer it conveniently and effectively for every applicant, person or employer, who needs it.

As Bill Stubbs pointed out at one of the steering group meetings for the project, 'FE has got the shortest pay-back time.' It's a good government investment, which is why we are currently the favoured sector. Tim Boswell has said, 'Where we really do fall down is at the craft level. That's why we have enhanced our efforts by putting the thrust of our expenditure into further education. We're trying to endow that route and that status with a greater importance, because we do understand that it matters in economic terms.'

It is not just important in direct economic terms, crucial though that may be. The pay-back may be quicker because FE can turn out qualified and trained students and workers faster than schools or universities can; it is also the **only** part of the entire system that welcomes in anyone who wishes to learn. There is an appropriate programme of learning for anyone, regardless of age or aptitude. The colleges are not only providing the widest range of educational opportunity, not only catering for more of the 16+ population than universities and schools taken together, they are also the most important route by which the National Targets for Education and Training might be met. We do lifelong learning on a scale and volume that no-one else can touch.

Further mention needs to be made here of the National Commission on Education, whose full report was published in 1993. Its title is of great significance: **Learning to succeed**. It implies a fundamental change in the nature of our educational system, a change from one where the majority of people have **failed**, to one in which all have the chance to **succeed**. The backlog of all of those who have been failed by the system in the past is enormous: only FE can offer them that second or even third chance. It is sad but predictable that the Secretary of State should have rejected two of the report's principal recommendations before he had even read it. As Sir Claus Moser most patiently emphasised, the Commissioners know very well that we can't do all of this next week. If we have to start from where we are – and of course we do – then the first steps on the thousand mile march are the most important. Let's hope that we can see some longer term commitments to these fundamental but vital policy changes when the knee-jerking has eased off. It's hard to be too buoyant about such a hope, however, when the counterproposal to this painstaking and detailed analysis of our educational failings is that of the starred A level.

One of the inconsistencies in current policy relates to the thinking about adult education. My definition of FE includes adult education: I see no value of any kind in sterile debates about where adult education best takes place. It is much more important that it offers appropriate points of access, and that it encourages progression. Eventually it will all need to come under the purview of the FEFC, because the current divide is irrelevant and harmful. Adult education classes in evening centres and church halls, as well as in FE colleges, need to be seen as part of a continuum – the way back into formal education and training which might never otherwise be taken. At what point will we also recognise that the quality of life for older people in our society is a legitimate concern, and may indeed be excellent value for money? Adult education is and should be seen to be a force for civic good.

Some of the biggest employers in the land have no doubt that such opportunities make economic sense: Ford EDAP, Rover REAL and Lucas CET are amongst the most radical educational developments of recent years, offering clear evidence that education, not just work-related training, benefits companies and individuals alike. These schemes and others like them may yet prove to be a turning point because they are offering opportunity to many amongst whom participation in learning has tended to be low.

The class factor again: of the 25 per cent of UK adults who make use of adult education, the highest proportion comes from socio-economic classes I/II, or people whose formal education continued beyond the age of 18. On this evidence, education in Britain is seen as a good thing mainly by those who have been good at it. This is no longer enough.

So where are we now, after our first year of incorporation? We're in reasonable shape. We are growing, though not all of us have hit our growth targets. We've had the message that HE in FE receives official approval (because it's cheaper, but let's not carp about that. There is more to complain about in the abrupt reversal of policy that took place soon afterwards). The Funding Council has made an excellent start in this author's view: it is obvious to all that there is a new authority and confidence about the sector, even if the latter is a little shaky from time to time. The colleges are being listened to as never before; we're consulted so much we can scarcely keep up. The funding methodologies are getting terribly complex, but then we're a complex sector. The intentions are clearly right: funding the activities that have to take place in all good colleges, and aiming at convergence.

There is still an awfully long way to go. We will have to deal much more urgently with the built-in inequalities in the system, let alone in society. For instance, how long can the higher units of funding in sixth form colleges be justified (not that they ever were)? When will part-time routes receive equal recognition and funding? (Though there are now hopeful signs in this regard.) Part-time students are as big a part of our future as full-timers, and the distinction will soon become meaningless as we unitise and modularise new curricula. When will there be some consistency in the funding of student support, which is getting more and more chaotic as local authorities take away their bat and ball? When will (some) university admissions tutors catch up on BTEC, let alone GNVQ? Will our British culture ever see FE as a primary element in social change and economic development? When will college principals be parachuted in to help on the boards of business concerns? The traffic is much too one-way at present.

Still, as we lurch erratically towards the millennium let us not forget – whatever our problems – that we are still achieving great things for our students. We will go on changing people's lives, and one day we may just find that we have changed British society. Most of us won't get to play the Hollywood Bowl, but some of our students will.

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Chapter 2: FE makes itself indispensable

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Tony Robinson quotes Malcolm Deere, Secretary of the Standing Conference on University Entrance, as saying at a recent meeting of educationalists that by the late 1990s over 40 per cent of university entrants would be likely to come from qualification routes alternative to A level, and most of these would be GNVQ. If government policy is to succeed, and if Britain is to match its international competitors in numbers in higher education and those with high level technical qualifications, this prediction will have to be proved right. We cannot meet our national targets nor even get anywhere near them by traditional academic and A level routes.

The necessary changes in our approaches to higher levels of participation in technical education have strong roots in the work that has been going on in colleges for the last 20 years. BTEC programmes have helped to transform staying-on rates and educational achievement. GNVQ is the logical further development of that success. NVQs are now established currency. Government(s) (and colleges) need to keep their nerve, address inconsistencies in legislation and funding, and help us and the students to celebrate the rewards.

Meanwhile, the academic world fights back and most university gatekeepers continue to exercise their traditional role by employing traditional thinking. No-one ever said it was going to be easy, but FE colleges have a critical part to play if the culture is to be changed. As Tony says, a successful future is about many people doing well, about capability and skill as well as knowledge.

'Whom are you?' said he, for he had been to night school.

Further education in 1994 is able to look at such put-downs and enjoy the joke. It is now at the centre of a major government strategy which has evolved rapidly since the Education Reform Act 1988 loosened local authority controls. This was quickly followed by the radical Further and Higher Education Act 1992 which created the new incorporated FE sector.

In a period when public sector spending is threatened by further big reductions, government has seen the need to invest more in colleges. Top civil servants and ministers come to our conferences to tell us we are the key to the nation's future and its economic survival. Anything other than delight and a willingness to accept the challenge would be an inappropriate response to this. Indeed, it would be uncharacteristic of further education to turn its back on any challenge. Yet we may perhaps permit ourselves the briefest of smug pauses to reflect that we must have been doing something right over the past 20 years.

That the nation appears to be discovering FE and what in particular it has to offer is not, of course, due entirely to the brilliance of the FE campaign group's pamphlets. 'Men are changed by what they do' – or fail to do, Auden might have added – not so much by enthusiastic evangelists. What the United Kingdom – and England particularly – has failed to do is to produce enough well-qualified people from its education system.

One of the most instructive insights on this great national issue came to me the other day as I glanced at Halliwell's **Film guide**. A brief one-liner summing up a 1935 Burns and Allen movie reads: 'dumb girl must graduate if college is to inherit a fortune'. If you can forget for the moment the sexist undertone, you can find some more positive points in the epithet. A way to a successful outcome will be found, no doubt the accreditation will be flexible enough to enable it to happen and certainly on this occasion, even though Gracie Allen probably never heard of Sir Christopher Ball, we can be sure that **'Learning pays'**.

Of course, some people would respond to this with the rejoinder that in Britain qualifications are not for sale. There might have been times when you could obtain a peerage in return for money, but not an A level. Unfortunately, such beliefs – though respectable enough in themselves – often go hand in hand with the view that good exams are those which have a healthy failure rate, and that the qualified élite should be preserved. A few years ago, when some public school teachers suggested that A levels were becoming too easy, Sheila Lawler of the Centre for Policy Studies said that we should invent another exam which was more difficult to pass. The furore over the improvement in GCSE pass-rates also reflected unease that more people appeared to be overcoming barriers that, in the eyes of some, should remain insurmountable. We all remember Kingsley Amis's 'more will mean worse' (from his essay in the 1970s) and the graffiti over the toilet rolls in university loos: 'Sociology degrees! Please take one'. Vocational qualifications have also been the object of similar suspicion from the purists who appear to have a rigid notion that quantity will always threaten quality.

Yet the National Targets for Education and Training seek to develop and measure the skills of the mass of the people. These targets depend upon a faith in people and in the belief that many more of them can and must aspire to higher qualifications and thresholds of success than has ever been the norm in the English pattern of thinking. Yesterday we had an education system designed to produce Nobel prize winners and top civil servants: tomorrow we must have one that produces – in numbers – people with sound basic education and technical and managerial skills. So going back to the Halliwell model, we have to have more 'dumb girls' (and boys) who must graduate if we are to inherit a fortune. Perhaps when it happens we shall find that they were not so dumb after all.

If the National Targets for Education and Training are to be achieved, we must not allow the best to be the enemy of the good. Those who inhabit the arid scrublands of the Centre for Policy Studies will not disappear overnight. There will continue to be arguments about standards and calls to establish seminaries of intellectual excellence, but they will be irrelevant as long as government keeps faith with further education, and FE delivers the goods. This is because a successful future is about many people doing well, about capability and skill as well as knowledge, about imaginative and flexible modes of curriculum and qualification delivery – in other words, about FE. It was no accident that we were singled out for favour.

One of the most important requirements for the achievement of national targets was an expansion in qualification routes. Crucially, it has been further education colleges which have developed these. The growth of BTEC courses, plus their increasing reputation as qualifications with currency, has been the most significant development. GCSE has been credited with some responsibility for the rise in post-16 participation rates, but BTEC should probably take the prize for this. Not only have BTEC National Diplomas been the most significant alternative to A levels and thus acted as a magnet for many who would have either failed or never stayed on in the first place, but they have also encouraged a mode of course delivery and an approach to assessment which, in their essentials, were later copied by GCSE and other examinations.

One of the problems with BTEC National Diplomas was that they did not lend themselves readily to the establishment of a modular curriculum. GNVQ does this and recent moves on the promotion of modularity in A levels will accelerate the process. GNVQ appears to be an overnight success, Alan Smithers notwithstanding. In spite of its teething troubles with some of the mandatory units, it has motivated both students and staff in remarkable ways and is producing innovative and flexible approaches to the curriculum. Advanced GNVQ and A levels sit comfortably side by side and in combination. In some cases both A levels and GNVQ outcomes are being delivered through the same course of study.

As Principal of one of the colleges which has piloted the qualification, one thing I have noticed is that young people have quickly picked up the significance and importance of it. CPVE was always hard to sell; GNVQ is much easier. It seems like an idea whose time has come. However, it could not have been introduced so easily had not BTEC and further education created the conditions for its growth.

There are some concerns about the currency value of GNVQ for entry to higher education. Malcolm Deere, the Secretary of the Standing Conference for University Entrance (SCUE), pointed out at the FE/HE Consortium launch at Salford University (May 1993) that the 'negotiable' element of optional and additional vocational units may mean that universities will need to be reassured about the possible variances between GNVQs from different institutions. He nonetheless predicted that by the late 1990s over 40 per cent of university entrants would come from alternative qualification routes to A level and most of these would be GNVQ.

Here again the development work of FE colleges could be crucial in securing the rapid acceptance required for the new qualification. The wide array of franchised and FE/HE compacts should mean that FE colleges and HE institutions can easily collaborate to ensure that students with GNVQ or other alternative qualifications can move easily between the sectors, and that trust in GNVQ will be rapidly established. The final effect of this on A levels may not bring about their rapid demise, but it will reduce the amount of territory that they occupy in the pre-higher education field.

More people will choose other routes into HE; fewer will be on the wrong course; more will succeed and **Unfinished business** (cf. Audit Commission/OFSTED report) will be more likely to be successful business.

None of this is likely to be as effective, widespread or rapid if full use is not made of GNVQ level II as a baseline, both within and outside FE. This qualification – and particularly the style of curriculum delivery that it predicates – is already having a dramatic impact on the post-17 staying-on rate. It emphasises at a crucial stage the importance of guidance, basic core skills and knowledge, and is capable of reinforcing this with appropriate work experience and follow-up review procedures. Universities as well as employers should build its achievements into their profiles of acceptability.

Specific NVQ accreditations are about to double in number over the coming year. Already the graduates of this system, with its in-built progression structure, are beginning to dominate whole industries and colleges have taken a lead in the development and delivery of management qualifications at level IV and soon at V. Demands for graduate competence in addition to intellectual rigour and knowledge seem sure to give the NVQ parallel track a greater significance at higher levels than was contemplated in its early days, when much attention was paid to the lower levels.

The stone which the builders rejected has become the keystone in the corner. Further education colleges have become experts in the curriculum and assessment developments most needed by the nation. With its past record FE should have no qualms about its ability to lead the charge for developing a competent and qualified workforce.

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Chapter 3: FE – all dressed up, but does it know where to go?

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Chris Hughes also thinks FE is indispensable but reminds us that there is a long way to go before everyone else understands why. We don't yet know whether we have found our place in the sun and will thrive in it, or whether we are simply being 'exposed to the rigours of a doctrinaire desert'. In order to do all that we are capable of doing, it will take much more than the ideology of the unbridled market. Government will need to invest in as well as recognise and promote coherence in post-16 education. The present government has made a start – our place in the sun – but if the further education sector is to prove to be the great engine for effective education and training, as Chris and others of us would claim, it will need sustained and consistent commitment to what is essentially a new and potentially uncomfortable ideology. As he says, there can be no doubt that lifelong learning for all cannot continue to be funded at current unit costs. FE will need all of its innovatory capacity and flexibility to do what is being asked of it.

> *To be scared is sensible; to be sure of anything is suicidal. The race will go to the curious, the slightly mad, those with a passion for learning and dare-devilry.*
> Peters and Waterman (1982)

As of 1 April 1993 there exists in England and Wales a clearly defined further education sector. It is now possible to obtain a document which lists all the colleges in this sector (FEFC 1993). That this is a remarkable state of affairs speaks volumes for the previous status of FE. The Further Education Funding Council is tackling its task with vigour and on a wide front, ranging from new approaches to learning technologies to terrorism insurance for all colleges. Impressive though this is – and comforting in the case of the insurance – these developments do not of themselves resolve the critical issues facing post-compulsory education and the role of FE colleges in our national education and training system.

There is now a national consensus that we are an under-educated and under-trained nation in comparison with our competitors, all of whom have mass or universal patterns of further and higher education. The UK is becoming dangerously isolated among advanced countries in relation to its education and training performance. Increased integration within the EU makes our position critical.

It is clear that the global, post-industrial revolution economy will be one in which wealth is created by the inventive and entrepreneurial output of a highly educated populace; an economy that sees education as a lifelong activity, not something to be dropped as soon as possible; an economy that values education and training as an essential investment in UK plc and not a burden on public sector borrowing.

We need to move on from having the worst industrial training record of any sizeable economy in the western world, with one of the lowest proportions of graduates and one of the lowest participation rates in post-school education of all the industrialised nations. We must develop a labour force trained to meet the challenges of the technological revolution – i.e. well-educated, adaptable, flexible – not one which is still largely locked into the needs and demands of the old industrial revolution.

South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore and Hong Kong have already transformed from a low technology/manual skills-based economy to a high tech/knowledge-based and information dependent economy. Britain has yet to complete this vital step. In South Korea, 85 per cent of the 17–18 year old age group stay on in secondary school, a considerably better participation rate than in Britain (45 per cent) and France (75 per cent). Over 50 per cent of Seoul's population attends higher education or has graduated at technician or degree level.

Detailed studies of the needs of many major employers clearly indicate that successful firms in the future will need education and training strategies that develop within the whole workforce a deep understanding of technologies. Such firms will need a workforce that has learned and developed well beyond current job requirements and is equipped with the skills of learning and the desire to learn, with a diversity of potential, talents and interests and capable of working together. Such successful firms will have track records of managing the unfamiliar effectively.

These employers see education, training and re-training as part of a continuum and long-term solutions to the nation's needs will be based on this realisation.

In Britain, when you leave school you normally leave education. This is not true in other countries. As Norman Fowler when Secretary of State for Employment said in a speech to the CBI (1989), 'We need education and training for life; education and training through life, portable education and training; standards of competence recognised and rewarded; a world-class workforce; every job a job with training'. In business a management emphasis is being given to human resource issues and the critical role they play in any successful enterprise. A study commissioned from Manchester University (Smithers and Robinson 1991) demonstrated how excellence for the few has, in the UK, been paralleled by relative neglect of the many. More recent studies have reinforced the message that we need to pause in our preoccupation with the supply of graduate labour and devote more attention to the supply of qualified, skilled and motivated people at all levels in the workforce.

Further education has always rejected the idea that education post-16 is about small élites. It believes that excellence should be defined in inclusive, embracing terms rather than seen as exclusive and barrier-building. It does not believe that 'more will mean worse' or that good examinations are those which fail a lot of people. FE endorses George Bush's declaration that 'there is no such thing as an expendable student' and that the achievements of a small, academic élite cannot compensate for the many whose talents are under-developed and under-used. It will be no use to Britain in the 1990s to boast of the occasional Nobel prize if we have failed to increase the numbers of people with meaningful qualifications.

Further education colleges weathered the 1980s as a decade of either hostility or indifference. The Manpower Services Commission (now TEED) sought to establish alternative training organisations, allegedly more flexible and responsive than colleges. The imperative was to deliver mass youth and adult training programmes. These monolithic national 'schemes' tended to view learners as objects rather than as subjects: square pegs to be fitted into round holes. Over-rigid distinctions were established: between education and training; between provision for adults and for young people; between those in work and those out of work. The whole process was driven by the political expediency of getting people off the unemployment register; effective training was a secondary consideration.

Eventually the deficiencies of this approach were recognised and both the employers' body, the Confederation of British Industry, and the Trades Union Congress produced reports (in 1989) concerned with improving the country's training record. Fortunately, the FE system survived the 1980s and its 'hopeless ad hocery' (Kenneth Clarke in a 1991 speech), emerging leaner and with increased recognition of its central role in our vocational education and training system.

Paradoxically, although the Education Reform Act 1988 was concerned almost exclusively with schools, it did have the indirect effect of bringing into sharper focus the many deficiencies of the post-compulsory sector – in particular, our appallingly low post-school participation rate and the need for a coherent and uniform system of vocational education and training. Stuart Maclure (1992) has described the record of developments in this sphere as a 'history of failure'.

It was Kenneth Baker's speech at Lancaster University in 1989 that at last acknowledged that the DES was aware of the problems of further education, though a more significant development in this respect was the CBI task force's report **Towards a skills revolution** (1989) which advocated a radical change in vocational education and training. It aimed to ensure that by 1995 all 16 and 17 year olds would be undertaking education and training relevant to their needs.

With the Further and Higher Education Act 1992 the future of the FE sector has been mapped out in broad outline and it should be possible to attempt some form of prognosis. The key problem areas are well known: the 16 – 19 curriculum; the lack of clear strategy for vocational education and training; continuing confusion about the wider function of further education colleges, especially in relation to adult and community education and its role within HE.

A central difficulty of reforming the 16–19 curriculum has been the failure of English education to integrate the academic and the practical, the general and the vocational. The White Paper **Education and training for the 21st century** (DES *et al.* 1991) expressed a firm commitment to removing the 'remaining barriers to equal status between the so-called academic and vocational routes.' However, as the A level 'gold standard' route is to remain, it is doubtful whether administrative and certification changes alone can bridge a divide which is essentially cultural.

A consensus seems to have emerged amongst educators, trainers and employers that vocational education and training in Britain is in need of urgent and drastic attention. The issue is high on the agenda of all the main political parties. However, the chosen methods of development through the expansion of training credits and strengthening the role of the TECs do not add up to a fully comprehensive and coherent system.

The reconstruction of the post-compulsory sector proposed in **Education and training for the 21st century** leaves many questions unanswered; it falls short of the demands being made by employers, trainers and educators.

The retention of A levels and the development of the NVQ framework will not bridge the vocational/academic divide. Nor does placing the responsibility for promoting these reforms with TECs and regional quangos amount to the establishment of a national VET system. The choice of an NVQ framework for future 16 – 19 curriculum reform deals only with vocational qualifications, not vocational education. Something much more radical is urgently needed.

There is increasing talk about the need to meet the World Class Targets which were initiated by the CBI and supported by the TUC and many TECs (and subsequently promoted by government as NTETs). An important target is that 80 per cent of young people should attain NVQ level II or its academic equivalent by 1995. A longer term target is that at least half of young people and the adult workforce should have reached NVQ level III or its equivalent by the turn of the century. Today, less than a third of our young people have attained that target. There is a mountain to climb. It is important that achievements on the slopes of the mountain are recognised, for it will be a nonsense to ignore those learners who have yet to reach NVQ level II but who have travelled some distance towards it.

There is emerging consensus about the centrality of education and training to economic revival. 'Education is at the top of my personal agenda' claims John Major, but the reality is that education's share of GDP has fallen from 5.5 per cent to 4.6 per cent over recent years. So is there consensus on the amount of investment that is needed?

If, as a country, we want wider participation and higher attainment in post-compulsory education and training, then we must be prepared to pay for it. This will involve ensuring that adequate resources are available both for the recurrent cost of tuition and the capital provision for buildings and equipment, and also for student support where this is necessary. This demands a more coherent and effective approach to the determination of the respective roles of public and private funding, and of market forces and planned provision. It also requires a clear national recognition and resolution of the dilemma that wider participation and higher attainments in post-compulsory education and training, plus cash-limited provision, are in contradiction with one another.

The truth is that funding and resourcing will need to be re-assessed in the context of new theories of learning which explain how people best learn, how best to teach and how best to harness new learning technology to make learning more effective. There can be no doubt that lifelong learning for all cannot continue to be funded at current unit costs. We must explore new models that are cost-effective but founded on the twin propositions that assessment must promote achievement rather than judge failure and, secondly, that participation – not selection and hierarchy – should be the driving force of the system.

The further education sector could prove to be the great engine for effective investment in education and training. FE at its best has always been responsive, dynamic, pragmatic and innovative in providing learning opportunities for the diverse needs of individuals, communities and industry. Guided by a new funding body, colleges could develop a new, creative and energetic response to the challenge of marketing high quality education and training to school leavers, adults and employers. However, the challenge to colleges and the new sector is substantial. David Robertson of Liverpool John Moores University has written:

> The crisis of the further education sector has been a symptom of the crisis of national educational priorities. Since colleges have generally defined their purpose as vocationally-focused, 'second chance' institutions, they have not enjoyed the status bestowed upon academically-focused sixth forms or universities. They have come to symbolise the rift between academic and vocational learning, between education and training, that has defined British post-secondary education. This rift has, in turn, retarded our national ability to reform our provision for the benefit of the majority of citizens.
> (Robertson 1994)

The government would claim to have responded to this argument. John Patten, speaking to an audience of college principals in December 1992 said, 'My vision is of a dynamic, thriving FE sector with greatly increased levels of participation and with more people, young and old, attaining high levels of qualifications and skills'. Uplifting though these sentiments are, he and his government have said little about the FE curriculum. Unresolved are questions of the new sector's boundaries with schools, sixth forms and universities. Government policy re the development of opportunities for adult education remains unclear. Most worrying of all, changes in the arrangements for further education have not been accompanied by an end to the muddle of support systems for students. Problems with grants, discretionary awards and the 21 hour rule become increasingly frustrating. The new model for the sector, more to do with the pragmatic necessity of dealing with the consequences of the poll tax fiasco than education, and borrowed from the very different world of higher education, is largely untested.

While the new paradigm is clear – competition, client-driven colleges, league tables, missions not rules, centralised funding, local markets and entrepreneurial activity – it remains to be seen whether these factors alone prove to be a successful substitute for other nations' approaches, which are more to do with greater emphasis on educational achievement and engendering high educational aspirations among individual learners. If we could develop a 'learning culture' in which parents and teachers have high expectations of their children's educational achievements, where the education systems are designed to provide opportunities and motivation for learners of all abilities, and where the labour market – and society in general – rewards those who do well in education, then at last we will have made progress.

The truth is that the ideology of the unbridled market is a busted flush. There is an emerging consensus which embraces enterprise and modest collectivism within a regulatory framework. Thirty years after Harold Wilson's famous 'white heat of technology' speech, its key messages of training and government investment are more relevant than ever.

Whether further education has found its place in the sun or has simply been exposed to the rigours of a doctrinaire desert depends on our collective ability to exploit new managerial freedoms at institutional level, sustain government expenditure, create holistic policies for post-16 education and training, and maintain our colleges' open door mission, so delivering the learning opportunities our people need and deserve.

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Chapter 4: Quality – beyond systems

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Quality has been the mantra of the 1990s, thus far. All sorts of people have been asking lots of money for telling us what it is, how we can have it, and how we can tell others about it. Like fresh air and freedom, its elusive nature has made it particularly attractive. There is now a better understanding of what is wrapped up in the word quality: responsiveness, customer-orientation, setting and monitoring of targets and so on. The debate has become entangled with arguments about value for public money, about the integrity or otherwise of examination results, and about the nature of professionalism in the context of education.

As with Keith Wymer's piece on equality of opportunity (chapter 9), the key to locating quality in the college is to ensure that it informs everything and suffuses all activities. It cannot be added like a new building or a new subject on the curriculum.

David Toeman's chapter draws the parallels with and the distinctions from the industrial model: colleges have a number of business characteristics, but are not just businesses. The history of BS5750 has been well-documented elsewhere, but it is worth remembering that it was devised for purposes quite different from those of FE. There are references elsewhere in this book to the Investors in People scheme, which concentrates on a particular aspect of quality, offering another route into quality management. Over-simplification of quality issues is the danger.

The story is told of a moderately successful pizza parlour in New York whose manager, Joe D'Angeli, inspired by a media blitz on quality as the ultimate ingredient in Japanese business success, decided to introduce a full-scale quality improvement system and so steal a march on his competitors in the neighbourhood. He read up all he could, brought in expert consultants, introduced a tailor-made system, closed down for a day to train the staff and reopened with a blaze of publicity in the local paper. New customers did not come. Soon key staff left. Within six months turnover had fallen so low that the business had to close. How could this be?

There is much experimentation with quality systems in further education at present. Some colleges have been accredited to BS5750, for all or part of their operations, some are working towards total quality management and others are operating within the framework of strategic quality management. This chapter is not a survey of all this richness, desirable as such a survey would be. It is, rather, an attempt to distil some of the lessons that have been learned from a much longer period of experimentation in industry and to see how they might be applied to a further education college, more successfully than Joe D'Angeli managed it for his business.

The quality movement started in manufacturing industry, which had the advantage of producing objects whose conformance to specification could be readily measured and whose production and control processes could therefore be adapted and tested against clearly defined outcomes. Manufacturers have increasingly gone beyond this to use customer satisfaction as the touchstone of quality and the key to business success. Service industries, including further education, have quite properly taken this as their starting point.

There is no generally agreed simple definition of who the customer is in further education, let alone what it might be to satisfy him/her. What is agreed is that the learner is at the heart of the service and its quality. I would say that all other customers are secondary, in the sense that their satisfaction can be achieved and measured through the satisfaction of the needs and expectations of learners. This leaves open the question of whether the needs of government and its agencies, expressed through education and training targets for example, should be central to considerations of quality. Clearly, they are central to the business imperatives of colleges.

It is not necessary to await an agreed definition of quality before engaging with the challenge of improving it. Quality is known when it is seen, though it may be necessary to sharpen and refine our ways of seeing in order to know it. There is good reason to believe that business success, whether measured by turnover, profit, growth, market share, shareholder approval or customer retention, is linked to customer-perceived relative quality ('nobody ever got fired for buying IBM'). Less clear is how to manage customer perceptions in such a way that satisfaction, once achieved, is maintained (look at IBM now). The evidence from practice that quality improvement systems raise customer satisfaction and therefore boost business performance is not overwhelming. To ignore the links between attention paid to service quality, the satisfaction of learners' expectations, and business success as measured by levels of funding, is risky for any college. It is not wise, however, to believe that the introduction of a quality improvement system will necessarily lead to an upward spiral of satisfaction, success and security.

Quality improvement systems do not improve quality, let alone deliver it. That is done by people. The purpose of a quality improvement system is to encourage people, i.e. we the college staff, to keep our attention focused on satisfying learners and to support us systematically in our efforts. The best systems aim for comprehensive, assured and sustainable improvements in the quality of the service offered. Comprehensive, because we cannot be sure what aspects of our service will satisfy each learner, and if we are engaged in an activity that is not focused on learners' satisfaction, perhaps we should stop it. Assured, because we want to know that the improvements we aim for are being achieved, so we can turn our attention from meeting to exceeding expectations and to inspiring others to experience the joy and profit of learning. Sustainable, because we do not want to expend all our energies in keeping plates spinning, or to follow IBM.

Quality improvement systems do not guarantee success, though they can improve prospects. The introduction of any system is likely to improve results for a while. However, the system is a means to an end and itself requires regular testing: does it, in practice, support and continue to support improvement in the quality of the service?

Only some parts of the college, and some staff, have a direct influence on the learner's experience. For many staff, and for all staff in some of their activities, the immediate object is not the learner. This is most obviously so in the case of managers. When the immediate focus is not the learner, two conditions are required for quality improvement to be comprehensive, assured and sustainable. First, that the activity is – albeit indirectly – related to, and understood in terms of, the needs and expectations of learners. Second, that the activity is not outside the scope of the quality improvement system. This is the double bind of attending to quality. Systems that ignore outcomes, i.e. the result of the learners' experience, or place these outcomes away from the focus of attention, will be apt to pile up layers of bureaucracy that divert energy from the purpose of the college.

On the other hand, systems that measure performance exclusively in terms of learner satisfaction will seek improvements only from those parts of the service closest to the learner, neglecting the intricate web of organisational dependencies into which the immediate servic [illegible]. Since the ultimate purpose is the outcome for the learner, that mu [illegible] ovide the ultimate measure of performance. However, the outcome can be limited by a low performance from anyone in the college. Anyone whose performance cannot adversely affect the experience for the learner is probably surplus to requirements; from which insight can be derived some interesting alternative measures of staff utility.

Two simple questions that anyone or any team in the college can ask help to focus attention and energy on the things that matter:

- what are the key features of my part of the operation through which we can check that learners' expectations are being met?
- what is the price for getting this wrong, and who pays it?

At any level in the college, from local to global, the features identified should be manageably few in number at any time. They will be key features because they concentrate on things that are important to the customer; i.e. where failure is paid for, however indirectly, by the learner. The price of failure will give an indication of priority. The best results in improvements in quality are obtained by organisations that encourage and enable staff teams to ask these questions, to set standards for themselves and to measure their own performance against their standards. For full effectiveness, these local standards will conform to, and assist in the derivation of, the declared standards of the organisation as a whole. The creation of this global setting is the responsibility of senior managers.

The immediate concern of managers is other staff. Teachers, technicians, receptionists, cleaners, caretakers and everyone else employed to work at the college can be properly regarded as customers of the managers. If the expectations of learners are at the heart of the college's purpose, then the needs of those who meet these expectations should be close to the hearts of those who manage the college. It is managers who provide resources, from strategies through decision structures and approvals, to knowledge, understanding and authority, space, equipment and cash, enabling those in the front line to perform effectively. This service model of management is more familiar in industry, particularly Japanese manufacturing, than it is in education. Any quality improvement system claiming to be comprehensive must set standards of performance for college managers; the group most likely to affect adversely, through neglect or lack of competence, the satisfaction of all learners. Without this the improvements that can be assured are limited and the whole will not be sustainable.

So, the quality-oriented college puts the satisfaction of its learners at the heart of its strategy and attends closely to the ways in which it organises itself to achieve that satisfaction. In other sectors, what distinguishes organisations that thrive, because they satisfy customers' needs, from those that fail – or survive despite not doing so? The distinguishing characteristic does not seem to be the type of quality system employed, or even that there is a quality programme in evidence. Research suggests that there is a common factor among firms to which customers return unfailingly, but that this factor is easier to describe than it is to measure, and easier to measure than it is to generate: staff have satisfaction and pride in their work, coupled with an understanding of what and who their work is for. Quality improvement systems, where present, are used by staff to stimulate, focus and support their own efforts to increase their pleasure, satisfaction and pride in the outcomes of their work. Managers provide a setting in which those efforts can be successful; that is the source of their pleasure, satisfaction and pride. The organisation is dedicated to learning about its customers, about itself and about relations between them.

The moral of Joe D'Angeli's story is that bandwagons can be noisy and expensive distractions from the true way. A college that focuses on its learners, that understands and improves its processes and unlocks the potential of all its staff has a good chance of succeeding. It does not matter what quality system is used to aid that success. For a college that does not attend to the expectations of its learners, improve its processes or develop its staff, neither does it much matter what quality system is imposed.

Chapter 5: A taste of conscription – looking back at entitlement

Ruth Silver, Principal, Lewisham College
in conversation with Adrian Perry, Principal, Lambeth College

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In these days of charters and learning contracts – which good colleges have had for years – it is as well to define our language fairly carefully. As far as one can judge, no-one is against them, but they clearly have to be meaningful. Is it all about having adequate access to IT, appropriate careers advice and such, or is it something about the quality of the educational experience?

This chapter attempts to define the thinking and the terms by listening to the debate. Ruth Silver and Adrian Perry conduct a civilised discussion around the themes of quality, charters, entitlement, the national curriculum, technical and tertiary education, the views of employers, vocationalism and – pre-eminently – choice and respect for the learner.

What is presented here is edited down from over 8,000 stimulating and idiosyncratic words, with the spirit and most certainly the commitment of the debate preserved.

And we also learn about the Newham GASP.

AP Ruth, you're associated with colleges like Newham and Lewisham which are widely admired for their student focus: so what's the objection to ideas of student entitlement? Why do you say you now have hesitations about it?

RS I've always had hesitations about it – and please note, neither Lewisham nor Newham ever had curriculum entitlement statements! They do have a student focus, you're quite right – and that had more to do with the locating and valuing of the needs the learner brought – rather than a blanket 'cure'; entitlement statements are too blanketing for me. My memory is of spending a lot of my professional life working on 'quality projects', looking at stuff arranged in lists which made no overall sense to me. Just remember some of them – work technology awareness and applications; the development of recording achievement; personal and social education; critical experiences of the world of work; application of IT; utilisation of learning skills; application of problem-solving techniques; development of learning and thinking skills; development of attitudes and values; development of physical and practical skills; development of forms of expression. Endless exaltations! Do you see how my allergy developed? It is this notion of a multi-vitamin pill education for everyone, whether they need it or no, rather than the remedy that fits. I'm arguing for a person's right to choose – come and talk about what you want to learn. The only entitlement worth offering is a programme that fits a particular need.

AP That seems to say that entitlement is a separate subject like English or maths or physics or hairdressing or business studies that we're forcing people to take, and it isn't. If it was that, people would vote with their feet, just as they voted with their feet not to attend Wednesday afternoon activities or liberal studies. But we moved away from that, didn't we, and paid attention to the inclusion of communication skills, making good presentations, using computers appropriately, making chemistry students aware of what mercury did to the sea, all as part of the mainstream . . .

RS Yes, but that's another debate and reminiscent of liberal studies. I have a view that entitlement at its height was about something quite different. It was at its hottest in the late eighties when we had TVEI coming across nationally for the first time, saying here is a framework for a coherent, age-related, foundation curriculum. It should contain industry-based experience, a record of achievement, tutoring and a review of progress as well as broad curriculum areas. So throughout the land grew up a number of alternative entitlement models about not dealing with TVEI. Now TVEI is one of my favourite curriculum frames, because it has all I value – a respect for learners, discussion about learning strategies, coherence and breadth. I do think entitlement in the eighties was about a system of defence – LEAs saying they knew better. That's why is was such a mixed and messy bag.

AP Ah, but remember where TVEI came from. TVEI was very rapidly captured by the natives, but the initial rhetoric that put up the backs of so many people was ministers saying, at a time of high unemployment, 'we are finding that school leavers do not have the skills to make a success of working life, and so we need to go into the educational system to put things right – we need work experience, better technology (especially IT), improved guidance, motivation, communication and numeracy'. The chapter in Lord Young's biography (1990) dealing with TVEI describes it as 'a dawn raid on education'. I actually think that TVEI was slightly fraudulent, in that a lot of good schools and colleges had to pretend that they had just discovered that careers education, guidance and IT were wonderful things in order to get hold of a little development or capital money.

RS Not true! In my view, it came from good practitioner practice, from many sources, brought together as a whole to form a national standard – and for the first time. Sure, central government used it as you describe, but its roots are **our** good practice put together differently and well.

AP I'm not convinced that entitlement was LEAs trying to get out of the demands of TVEI. I think entitlement came from an analysis of the shortfalls of many colleges, especially in guidance and review, and put forward an idea that said to the clients, 'when you come out of this thing, you are entitled to have had an education which developed decent communication skills, gave experience of working as a team and where you had access to and became fluent in the use of IT' and so on. It's something that we would now recognise as part of the quality assurance debate.

RS No, those are still the core skills issues, and that's not about entitlement as much as a basic requirement. I am happy with core skills. What I have difficulty with is the lists we had, and the way everyone grew their own. Could the entitlement issue be a control tool that allowed LEAs with schemes of delegation to continue to control their schools and colleges after the Education Reform Act 1988? I hadn't seen anything written on entitlement until ERA came along; curriculum entitlement statements were overwhelmingly prepared by LEAs. All of it had too heavy a political flavour. A distortion in the learning process went on because of entitlement. The Policy Studies Institute report by Stuart Maclure (1991) describes entitlement as 'an **obligation** on providers'. Where is the learner in all this? The focus must be on what learners say they want for themselves in a rigorous and muscular debate with professionals.

AP I accept that the two things – ERA and the entitlement debate – went on at roughly the same time. I'm far from sure that there was cause and effect relationship. Even if there was, you could argue that an Act which located the day-to-day management of education with the institutions, but the quality control with an over-arching body (the LEA) made it appropriate for that body to say: 'this is what we are looking for'. However, to get back to the issue, where is entitlement different from student choice in your model? Is it the same thing?

RS Not quite. I'm thinking more of questioned student choice. Entitlement is antithetical to this. It says, in effect, you have no choice. You can do the programme you want but we know you also need work technology applications. Are we really so sure? They could already be experts in it! Students must be encouraged to talk about what and how they want to learn.

AP Student choice is a seductive idea, but I want to introduce a medical analogy, where people come in with a specific need (e.g. curing an inflamed appendix) and the medical experts know how to deal with that. Sometimes education is like that: people will come in and say, 'I need to learn how to use a particular piece of software, or master a given vocational skill – you're the expert, tell me how it's done.' In such cases it is not open to choice, like the colour of the clothes you wear. We know that to succeed in export marketing you need a foreign language and to have a decent grasp of commercial principles, so someone who comes in and says, 'I want to succeed in exporting, can I do pottery?' would be ill-served if we agreed with them.

RS Maybe my disaffection comes from seeing entitlement which was often all form and no content. So students who came in wanting to do typing were made to do other things they didn't want to do. It had that taste of conscription. I want to respect student choice, and be respectful to the content of the vocational impulse.

AP Let's respect student choice and mobilise their vocational desires by all means. But can I put a couple of deviant thoughts in? The first one is that you talk to students who've left the college and been out in employment for three or five years (as the Americans do). You ask them, 'what did you not do at college or at school that you really wish you had done' and the things that people often mention are the very entitlement demands that students wish to avoid: careers guidance, how to present to large groups, how to work in teams, relating to the opposite sex. They look back and pick out the non-instrumental – non-vocational if you like – attitudes and skills. Perhaps professionals do know best when we name these things as components in an effective course of study, even if a student wouldn't choose them. The other point is to say that the student we have is no longer the day release apprentice. It is often a person with no experience of employment. To some degree we get people who come to us at 16, 18 or 21 and say, 'I want to be an effective worker in a bank. I don't know what that implies, but give me the skills and qualifications to do it, tell me what's needed and I'll do it.'

RS Sure, professionals sometimes know better, but what we don't know is what is needed **when**. I still believe 'cometh the time, cometh the learning'. Why give people all sorts of experiences before they make sense to them? Is there an assumption that there is only one chance to learn in life, so let's cram it all in now? It's only when you're in the work based learning situation, or when learning physics, for example, that you will discover that your maths isn't up to scratch. So then you will look back to the learning clinic, and hot-house some maths learning there, then go back into physics again. So it's not stopped, you aren't made to look stupid. This approach concentrates on when the learning intention is present and that is when the learning strategy needs to be mobilised in the institution.

AP OK, so education is not a haversack which is strapped on your back before you are pushed out onto life's journey, so perhaps we can wait for people to come back.

RS Yes. I think that we can drip feed experiences – let learners have a sense of choice. What I wanted to say is that learners are entitled to a location in the organisation that says, 'we'll talk to you, we'll hear what you have to say and put before you a range of learning activities and options.' We're back to **A basis for choice** (FEU 1982). Perhaps that's all entitlement can be about – a basis for choice, which is always available. In the past, our work on special needs came up with four curriculum tenets, which declared that all learning programmes should be:

- Guidance supported,
- Adult role focused,
- Student centred,
- Progression oriented.

(Known on the streets as the Newham GASP.)

That's what you view courses against – the delivery of these tenets – differently for different learners. It isn't a deficiency model of the learner. It says we will provide something for you to meet your needs, rather than do something in common to all of you.

AP That seems close to the idea of defining entitlement in terms of quality, saying what you should have is a product with certain characteristics. There are other ideas of entitlement which are equally interesting. Let's look at the social definition of entitlement – such as, you're entitled to an award, or decent childcare – or Tory ideas around the student charter (clear information, etc.) Then there is the idea of entitlement edging towards core, and that's about saying you should have a course that allows you to transfer between jobs and between courses, taught in a way that allows you to move on and across and up.

RS Couldn't it be that the notion of entitlement is simply outdated, given the developments in the national frameworks, which are what we have to throw our energy behind. The world has changed – incorporation being the least of it – but the new frameworks around a national curriculum in schools, NVQs, GNVQs and the more limited reform of A levels mean something quite different for us. I want to look ahead, and my worry is that the rebirth of the entitlement debate is in fact hanging on to decades gone by.

AP I have a lot of sympathy with that. Reading **Towards a framework for curriculum entitlement** (FEU 1978) again, you feel like a logical positivist in the first days of linguistic philosophy looking back at moral philosophers of the past and saying, 'this is not right or wrong, but something that's confused.' Some of it reads very much like the charter stuff ('have access to appropriate careers guidance, negotiate a suitable programme of studies, have regard for equal opportunity issues') and it's almost saying that this is what a client should expect, but then it gets mixed up with ideas about 'what's the right way to teach chemistry?' Then it appears to be about client satisfaction and quality.

RS I want to see the debate go back into the technical relationships within the classroom. So how do we teach maths properly, what are the learning strategies that really increase language competence . . .?

AP You see it then as a diversion from the basic, standard needs of competence? You seem to be going back to a desire to be honest tradespeople: 'if someone wants to mend cars, we'll teach them how in a way which is quick and effective and which enables them to get qualifications. But we'll not try to change their lives or pretend that they are deficient human beings if they lack these things'.

RS Well, something about honesty came to mind. I saw lots of activity around electives and, I don't know, there was something of a lie about it. It was a sector and a system in flight, instead of getting on with teaching maths well, and that sounds very reactionary, and I'm not. But we got too big for our boots, too hubristic, at the end of the last decade, and we knew so much better these lists of high moral qualities and high level skills and so we neglected basic tasks.

AP But what are basic tasks? Ask the employers, and they'll say, 'I want someone who is bright, optimistic, has a sense of humour, is trustworthy with money, turns up in time, works well in a team, is well organised. OK it would be nice if they knew the difference between a gram and a kilogram, but I think I can sort that out myself if they can't do that.' So where does that leave your search for the perfect maths lesson rather than working on transferable skills and attitudes?

RS But developing attitudes takes a whole lifetime, and skills teaching is much easier. I also think that one is equally a by-product of the other. People who have been well taught, treated respectfully and given a place to have their say and have it listened to, and seen the impact of what they say, **do** have self-confidence, they are better at working with other people because they have had an experience of respect, of having had a place.

AP You seem to be saying 'students should not be patronised', but isn't all expertise patronising in a sense? Every time I go into a plumbing class and say, 'this is how you bend a pipe,' I am implicitly saying, 'I know how to bend a pipe better than you do.'

RS But in your context that's something they have come to you for, clearly explicit in their course request and in the contract for learning. What they don't come for is to be made a 'whole person'. Maybe they are a whole person already, maybe they are self-aware already, maybe they have empathy and trust, that's why I'm deeply suspicious about all this. I want to ask people to think what input they are entering about learners when they list what they should learn in this blanket way, and what are we saying about humanity when we come up with these lists.

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Chapter 6: Towards a credit culture in further education

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If what we are really about in the next few years is redesigning the nation's post-compulsory education system, it may be that the essential design tool is a comprehensive methodology for credit accumulation and transfer. There are profound implications across the range of our work, from our approaches to teaching and learning, to assessment and examination bodies, and to our concepts of educational success and failure.

The underlying rationale for a post-16 credit accumulation and transfer framework is laid out by the Further Education Unit in **A basis for credit?** (FEU 1993)

Peter Wilson's chapter is a valuable primer on the technicalities of a credit-based system. As we move towards achievement-based funding systems, and the representation of achievement in terms of learning outcomes, we will need to translate this interesting concept into working structures.

One issue which Peter Wilson does not – deliberately – treat at length is that of the potential benefits from the development of a single system covering HE and FE. He and others, notably David Robertson in his work for the Higher Education Quality Council (HEQC), see the great advantages to be secured through a single and comprehensive system which recognises educational credit right through our present demarcations. Though this is revolutionary stuff in a country that prefers evolution, preferably slow, it is likely to be a necessary part of the systems we will need if we are to achieve the more ambitious of our targets.

Although the incorporation of colleges clearly marked the most significant change in the FE sector in 1993, another less dramatic but more long-term change was beginning to work its way into FE colleges, and may yet prove to be equally profound. It may be that 1994 also comes to be seen as the year in which FE irrevocably embraced the idea of credit accumulation and transfer (CAT) as one of the key organisational principles of the sector.

The groundwork for this future system of credit accumulation and transfer is currently being laid. Among the more significant aspects of recent development we can identify the two FEU publications entitled **A basis for credit?** (1992 and 1993) and the subsequent collection of papers entitled **Discussing credit** (1993) as the key theoretical documents of a future CAT system. The establishment of a National CATS Task Force by HEQC and the setting up of a National CAT Network by FEU provide fertile ground in which the ideas in **A basis for credit?** are being further tested and refined in the field.

Notwithstanding these developments, it would be true to say that it is the idea rather than the reality of a CAT system that is currently engaging the enthusiasm of large parts of the FE sector. The benefits of credit accumulation and transfer are acclaimed, and the successes of CAT systems in the UK higher education sector and in the USA are widely appreciated. However, establishing a CAT system that is both functional and beneficial to learners and providers in FE presents us with a number of potentially complex problems which have yet to be resolved.

It is worth recording the progress that has been made in building a wide consensus of approval of the key features of a CAT system through development activities explicitly designed to test out the key proposals in **A basis for credit?** The need to extend this consensus into more difficult areas is also signalled. It is important to emphasise the current rate of development on the ground. Although key issues remain to be resolved, it is not too optimistic to anticipate that the basis of a functioning CAT system in FE will be established during the first year of operation of the newly incorporated FE sector.

The need for a CAT system

One of the key implications for **A basis for credit?** was that the FE sector did not already have a system of credit accumulation and transfer. We should not underestimate this important grounding for future developments, since it is possible to read references to the idea of credit in most major documents published recently by awarding bodies, examination boards and bodies such as NCVQ and SCAA. We may summarise the consensus on this basic issue very simply:

A CAT system is a good thing.

We don't already have such a system.

We therefore need to develop one.

A comprehensive system

Another important consensus now clearly established is that a CAT system has to be comprehensive in its scope. *It must encompass (potentially) all the activities of* the FE and HE sectors and beyond. A framework needs to be developed within which all potential users (learners, providers, awarding bodies, employers, etc.) can gain access to this system. We do not at present have such an open system of credit in the UK. This second important consensus can be summarised thus:

A CAT system is a good thing.

Therefore, everyone should have access to it.

The key features of a credit framework

A basis for credit? identifies four key features of the framework within which a CAT system would operate:

outcomes

units

credits

levels

We may represent this diagrammatically by placing the concept of the unit at the centre of a triangle which links the other three terms (see **Figure 5**).

In other words, a unit combines these three concepts in a particular way which enables learners' achievements to be represented consistently within a CAT system. Although these are familiar and (I would hope) not too complex terms, we do not share consistent definitions of them across the FE sector. The significant contribution of **A basis for credit?** is that it proposes specific definitions for these terms and attempts to combine them in a rational and comprehensive framework.

A number of simple statements follow logically from these concepts. Four are worth highlighting here:

i) a unit is a combination of learner achievements;

ii) each unit has a credit value;

iii) each unit has a level;

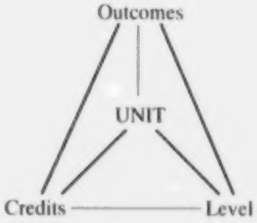
iv) credit is awarded for the successful completion of a unit.

These apparently simple statements generate easy consensus amongst those beginning to apply the specifications of **A basis for credit?** in their work in colleges. However, each one also needs to be seen as an integral part of a more complex whole. We are still only part way towards a shared understanding of how these concepts can be combined into a future CAT system.

Outcomes

The advent of NVQs and GNVQs has created a familiarity within the FE sector with the idea that learning achievements can be represented in terms of outcome statements. However, other parts of the FE sector (most notably A levels) are not expressed in terms of learning outcomes. While it may be tempting (even interesting) to speculate about the credit value of a particular A level, we need to recognise that although credit can be awarded for any kind of learning achievement, these achievements have first to be expressed in terms of their learning outcomes. Currently, A levels are not so expressed.

Figure 5: Structure of the key features of a credit framework



We should also note the corollary to this problem: that any kind of learning achievement can be expressed through learning outcomes. In other words, it is not solely those outcomes prescribed within the NVQ framework for which credit can be awarded. The work of Open College Networks (OCNs) in transforming thousands of adult education and training programmes into a learning outcomes format needs to be highlighted here, particularly as most of them now fall within the scope of funding through the FE sector.

Units

It needs to be emphasised that the specifications in **A basis for credit?** do not include the 'size' of a unit. Indeed, the whole concept of size is technically irrelevant to the intrinsic qualities of a unit. It is the ascribing of a number of credits to a unit which enables us to refer to its size in relation to other units.

Similarly, units have no specified 'shape'. They are not units of delivery, nor units within a timetable. They are not (necessarily) neat subdivisions of an award or learning programme. They are simply logical clusters of learning outcomes, and what may be logical in one context need not be logical in another.

The definition of a unit frees those responsible for organising and delivering the curriculum from the restrictions of specified size and shape. It creates unlimited potential for a variety of flexible approaches to the FE curriculum through this critical separation of the concept of the unit from either the organisation of delivery (modules) or the ascribing of value to achievements (credits). Although work within the credit framework has produced a number of paradigm examples of curriculum organisation where a unit = a module = a credit, this is a possible rather than a necessary specification of the credit framework.

Credits

I have remarked above on the widespread use of the term 'credit' within post-16 education and training. One of the major achievements of **A basis for credit?** has been to create a specific definition of credit out of this general usage of the term. It may be overly naive to state that a CAT system has to be founded on a uniform and consistent definition of credit, but that is the critical contribution of **A basis for credit?**, which has permitted a quantum leap in the pace of progress towards a future CAT system.

Credits have been referred to as the building blocks of the CAT system. This is a useful analogy, though probably not in the way originally intended. It does not do significant justice to the concept of the credit to compare it to an infant's toy. The building blocks analogy refers more usefully to atomic theory. The insertion of the concept of the credit into our known world of courses, qualifications and rules of progression provides us with a simple concept through which it is possible to understand, compare, deconstruct and reconstruct all the elements of the FE curriculum.

As credits are 'freed' from the constraints of any particular award or learning programme they can fulfil this critical task. In other words, we need to view the credit as the basis for a comprehensive and consistent measure of learner achievement which can be applied to the whole of the FE sector, and beyond. In this sense the credit is value free – a necessarily arbitrary measure that (like all other units of measure) is subject to rules of division and combination which can be comprehensively applied to all forms of learning achievement.

A basis for credit? proposed a definition of credit based on the following construction:

> those outcomes which the average learner might reasonably be expected to achieve in a notional 30 hours of learning.

The responses to **A basis for credit?** have created a sufficient consensus for this definition of credit now to be formally adopted as the 'baseline technology' of an open CAT system. In a different world, the figures 10, 20, 40, 50, etc. might have been substituted for 30 and would have formed an equally arbitrary (and therefore equally sound) basis for such a definition. Nevertheless, in this world we are now beyond the stage where it is worth reinventing a different unit of measurement for the credit. There are other, more complex issues to be resolved in the move towards a comprehensive CAT system.

Levels

Like credit, the term 'level' has a widespread usage in post-16 education and training. **A basis for credit?** clearly establishes a rationale for developing a system of levels within a credit framework. However, it does not offer definitions for these levels. Subsequent development activity in the field has indicated an urgent need to develop such definitions as a critical feature of the credit framework. Since the publication of **A basis for credit?**, the Further and Higher Education Act 1992 has provided the new FE sector with an implied framework of levels that may assist the development of these definitions. In particular, Schedule 2 of the F and HE Act enables us to move closer to a clear answer to the question of how many different levels there should be within the credit framework, both within FE and outside it.

Leaving aside the issue of how many levels of achievement might be identified within higher education, Schedule 2 clearly establishes four levels of achievement within the FE sector. These are based primarily on levels I, II and III of the NVQ framework, and their academic equivalents. Schedule 2 also explicitly establishes a level of achievement prior to entry to the NVQ framework, within which the achievements of learners lacking basic skills or having learning disabilities may be recognised.

Once the principle is clearly established that there are four levels of achievement prior to entry to HE within the credit framework, it becomes much easier to develop definitions and names for these four levels. It is this point that development has now reached. There is wide consensus on the number of levels within that part of the credit framework relevant to FE. On this consensus now needs to be constructed a set of definitions that is broad enough to include all possible learning achievements, and explicit enough to enable rational judgements to be made about which units are to be located at which levels.

We should also note at this point that the particular relationship of level to unit within the credit framework means that qualifications and learning programmes can be made up of units at different levels. Again, this is a subtle but potentially critical specification of the credit framework, which should enable the gradual development of more flexible courses and awards as the credit framework becomes more widely established.

Currency

A basis for credit? refers to the credit as 'the basic currency of a CAT system'. We need to speculate at this juncture about how this currency is to be developed. In other words, we need to ask the questions of credit that we would ask of any currency:

- who will issue credits?
- how will their value be underwritten?

It should be noted here that the definition of credit in **A basis for credit?** establishes one of the two key characteristics of a currency:

- a uniform definition of face value.

The credit framework in itself, however, cannot offer the second key characteristic:

- the face value consistently represents real value.

Although **A basis for credit?** is silent on how this second characteristic of the credit as currency is to be developed, current activity within the FEU's National CAT Network indicates a strong consensus as to how this currency value is to be established.

This consensus is emerging naturally from the logic of the specifications of the credit framework itself. The ascribing of credit value to a unit requires a judgement to be made about the 'reasonableness' of that value in terms of what 'the average learner' might achieve in a notional 30 hours. This ascribing of credit value is not an exact science. It is dependent on a process of rational approximation rather than the precise application of prescribed formulae. It therefore follows that the wider the group which is asked to confirm the reasonableness of this credit value, the more rational the approximation will be. In other words, the greater the variety of perspectives on the particular credit value of a unit, the closer we can get to the idealised notion of the average learner.

The implication is that an individual provider or college is, by itself, only partially competent to make rational judgements about the ascribing of credit value to a unit. If we also accept that it will be logically impossible to bring together all possible providers of any one unit, we are left with the compromise of the limited group of providers as the key determiners of the credit value of any unit. It is this consortium-based approach which is emerging naturally from development work in the field designed to test out the feasibility of applying the proposals in **A basis for credit?** within the FE sector.

Credits and qualifications

The development of 'credit consortia' will also enable a clear division of responsibilities to be established between those for awarding credit and those for awarding qualifications. The role of credit consortia would be to underwrite the consistent application of the specifications of the credit framework to learning opportunities offered by providers within these consortia.

It would be for an awarding body to determine the rule of combination for credits at particular levels and, in particular, units that a learner would need to accumulate in order to achieve a particular qualification. It would also be for an awarding body to determine the limits of credit transfer of particular units into any one of its qualifications. This separation of responsibilities between credit consortia and awarding bodies for the issuing of credits and qualifications will permit the further development of a CAT system without compromising the existing responsibilities of either awarding bodies or agencies such as NCVQ or SCAA.

It may also be worth noting in passing that the role of consortia will not affect the responsibility of any individual provider to offer any kind of learning programme. The role of the consortia will be to award credit, not to impose planning restrictions on colleges.

The nature of consortia

In order for these consortia to play an effective role in underwriting the quality of the CAT system they will need to have four key characteristics.

1. They should be cross-sectoral, involving all potential providers within a CAT system (FE colleges, universities, adult education centres, employers, etc.).
2. They should be voluntary associations, determining their own boundaries of operation.
3. They should be large enough to guarantee a comprehensive range of experiences across a wide variety of curriculum areas and levels of provision.
4. They should be small enough to be cost-effective in their key activities leading to the award of credit.

It may be that some of these credit consortia can be developed by building on the experience of OCNs. Certainly the particular form of development of consortia in Wales seems to indicate this as a possibility. However, OCNs do not currently provide comprehensive coverage of the UK, and may themselves need to adapt and modify practices and procedures in order to fulfil the requirements of a comprehensive and cost-effective CAT system.

Towards a national system

We should not underestimate the value of the specifications of **A basis for credit?** in stimulating and supporting activity at a local level. FE colleges and other providers across the UK are now actively engaged in a process of developing some part (and in a few cases all) of their curriculum offering within the definitions of outcomes, units and credits put forward by the FEU. The knowledge that college A is developing credit-based units within the same framework as college B and college Z has released a veritable avalanche of curriculum development activity within the sector, as the establishing of the FEU's National CAT Network illustrates.

In many instances, achievements on these credit-based units are leading to the award of credit through Open College Networks. However, those involved in OCNs would be among the first to admit that, though the OCN model has the potential to be developed into the credit-awarding consortium required by a national framework, the potential scope of credit-awarding activities within a comprehensive CAT system would take even long-established OCNs into a different scale of operations. Nevertheless, indications from the field (for example from Wales, London and Leicestershire) are that development models are emerging which build upon OCN structures and practices within devolved regimes of quality assurance. These in turn build upon FE colleges' own quality assurance arrangements, where these exist.

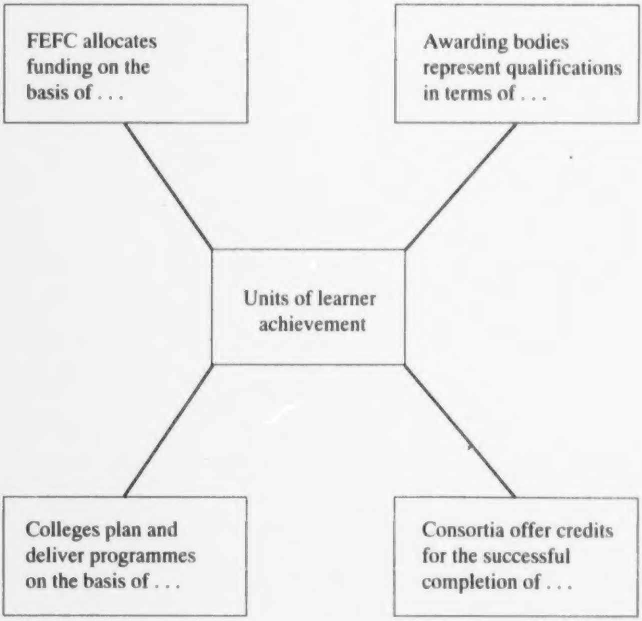
Just as these credit consortia are developing naturally out of the coming together of providers to underwrite the currency value of credits, we may look to a future development path where the consortia achieve genuine national coverage and themselves construct over-arching agreements to ensure that a CAT system operates consistently across all its constituent parts. Another possible development path (and not necessarily a contradictory one) would be the establishing of a national agency, representative of all potential users of a CAT system, which would be charged with specific responsibilities relating to the approval, development, monitoring and evaluation of credit consortia. At this point in time, either 'credit union' or 'central bank' models (or a combination of both) seem possible.

The role of the FE sector

Irrespective of the particular path of development towards a genuinely national CAT system, the role of the FE sector will be critical in determining the operational form of this system. The groundswell of support for the idea of a CAT system, plus the range and level of curriculum development activity within colleges, is impelling us towards the need to address these national arrangements. If the support within FE colleges can be wedded to interest and a commitment to development by other key actors within the sector (notably awarding bodies and funding agencies) we may be able to establish the basis for a national system sooner than most of us have so far dared to think.

The linking of different interest groups in the development of a national CAT system can be graphically illustrated by returning once again to the key place of credit-rated units of achievement in a future FE system (see **Figure 6**).

Figure 6: The Key place of credit-rated units of achievement


FEFC allocates funding on the basis of . . .
Awarding bodies represent qualifications in terms of . . .
Units of learner achievement
Colleges plan and deliver programmes on the basis of . . .
Consortia offer credits for the successful completion of . . .

Conclusion

This chapter has deliberately focused – perhaps too exclusively at times – on development within the new FE sector. It should be emphasised here that the development of a national CAT system needs to go beyond these boundaries, both upwards into HE and outwards into other providers offering learning opportunities prior to HE entry.

Notwithstanding this larger canvas, it seems increasingly obvious that at present it is the FE sector itself – and in particular the newly incorporated colleges within the sector – that is critically important in realising the potential of current developments towards a national CAT system. A clear and positive indication of support from FE colleges that the establishment of such a system is not only desirable but feasible, and that a national framework for such a system needs to be placed on the agenda immediately, may yet ensure that 1994 comes to be seen as the year of the CAT as well as the year of the college.

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Chapter 7: Devising a new funding methodology for further education – the funding learning approach

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Until FEFC collated the information, no-one – absolutely no-one – had any idea at all at what rates all of the different colleges were funded. We were shocked, horrified, dismayed, amazed when the results of their exercise were published in **Circular 93/09** (FEFC 1993a). We had not expected such variation, and it was even whispered within FEFC that had they known the true picture, they would have been more willing to seek convergence much faster rather than maintain such disproportionate stability.

The task has been enormous, and of course it is not yet completed. Early in 1994 we received the new tariffs, following the record number of responses received after **Circular 93/32** (FEFC 1993b). The methodologies are being devised by people working in colleges as well as by the Council's financial team: we are being consulted and we are commenting.

Richard Gorringe has been very actively involved in the planning of the new approaches. It is encouraging that the first consultative document put its focus clearly on **Funding learning** (FEFC 1992), and recognised that the learning experiences of our enormously diverse range of students do not start and finish in classrooms. We are being invited, fairly forcibly, to expand, to increase 'productivity', to be measured on outcomes.

The new funding framework being established requires major change in colleges and it supports the change to a stronger focus on the needs of learners. It could be bumpy ahead, but at least the playing field is getting more level, and funding will (we go on believing) follow success.

Introduction

The creation of the new further education sector, funded by the Further Education Funding Councils in England and Wales, raised the question of an appropriate national funding methodology. Unlike higher education, there are no precedents for national funding, and an analysis of local authority funding methodologies carried out for the FEFC revealed enormous disparities in practice (FEFC 1992, Annex C). The FEFC saw this as a golden opportunity to develop a completely new methodology which would explicitly support the vital, national role of the FE sector. Consequently, a working group was established and the important document **Funding learning**, discussing funding and setting out possible options from 1 August 1994, was published at the end of 1992. In June 1993, the Council selected one of 10 options proposed in the document, to be implemented from 1 August 1994.

This chapter sets out some of the thinking behind **Funding learning**, and the funding methodology to which it gave rise, and relates it to the development of what has been called the 'third force' in British education – i.e. further education. **Funding learning** aims to ensure that the nature and process of funding colleges and adult centres in the new sector will enable them to enjoy national esteem alongside schools and universities. The challenges are clear; the aim is that the funding methodology becomes a help and not a hindrance in meeting them.

Background

Perhaps the first striking feature of **Funding learning** is its title. This was chosen to indicate that, in the working group's view, the primary purpose of providing funds to colleges is – or ought to be – to enable them to 'make learning happen' for their students. Behind this apparently simple concept lies a debate within the group, reflecting the national debate, about what precisely FE is for. Before we can know what ought to be funded it is necessary to ask: what is FE there to do? What is required of it by government, as the chief paymaster, and by its customers — the community at large? These primary questions lead to others, such as: whose needs should it be addressing? Which needs, nationally, are best met in FE, and which elsewhere?

In practice these detailed questions are being addressed locally, for example, through the strategic plans that all colleges are required to produce. At national level, the government has been clear at least since the 1991 White Paper **Education and training for the 21st century** (DES *et al.*), that whatever the answers to the detailed questions, it requires two key things from FE: provision for more students and, with that, more qualifications. In more prosaic terms, the role of FE is to improve the staying-on rate at 16, and generally to improve the skills and qualifications base for people of all ages.

This combination of extra numbers and more qualifications is very important for the future of FE. Government is determined to raise participation, primarily of 16–19s, and the Secretary of State's guidance letter to the Chairman of FEFC gave as one of the key aims of funding:

> to provide a direct incentive to colleges to expand participation . . .
> (FEFC 1992)

Government has also made it clear that increased numbers must bring more, and better, achievements in the form of qualifications. The same letter expresses the government's commitment to the National Targets for Education and Training (NTETs) launched originally by the CBI in July 1991. These are intended to improve economic performance by raising the qualifications base of individuals – primarily vocational, but the NTETs also encompass academic equivalents.

For those of us in FE, increased numbers of students are very acceptable because it gives us the opportunity to provide more people with the good things we offer. However, the second key aim, concerning the nature and level of their achievement, is if anything more crucial. This is because, unlike government and its civil servants, we deal with the customers (our students) in a direct, day-to-day, human relationship. We know that they come wanting something, some kind of betterment, ranging from the most basic skills to degree-level qualifications. It means nothing to our 16 year olds that their presence may be increasing the staying-on rate by a few percentage points. What they want is a chance to learn skills, acquire knowledge and understanding, and to carry away some proof of what they have achieved – some useful symbol of their investment of a part of their lives in future prospects.

What this means is that since our students, above all else, come to learn and achieve, from the customer's point of view this is the primary purpose of further education. Since we must be dedicated to serving our customers, then making learning happen must be our key concern, whatever other tasks we may be given by government. Providing teaching will be important, but facilitating learning through all possible means is what funding is actually needed for. This is true not only for those whose presence, despite their apparent discomfort with learning, indicates a sometimes desperate desire to learn.

There are certainly discontinuities between the professionals' desire to meet our students' needs for learning, in the widest sense, and the government's adoption of national qualifications targets. However, demonstrably poor results in terms of students' achievements are causes of equal concern for both. The Audit Commission/OFSTED report **Unfinished business: full-time educational courses for 16–19 year olds** (1993), with its claims of low success rates and high drop-out, was at one level a challenge to the FE service to become more efficient. Yet no-one can be satisfied if the recent boom in FE enrolments does not lead to a corresponding increase in what more students want: tangible achievement.

Behind **Funding learning**, then, lies a consensus that a funding methodology must be directed at supporting colleges in making learning happen, and that learning is the mission of FE. This raises the key issue of how funding can relate to learning as well as to numbers of students. Thinking this through led the group to focus on the learning process as it is generally structured in FE. The resulting model, which recognises entry, on-programme, and achievement phases, became a key feature of **Funding learning**, and provided the vehicle for proposing a new funding methodology.

A model of learning

Chapter 2 of **Funding learning** opens with the words: 'Further education is characterised by diversity and complexity'.

This is a defining characteristic of FE, and applies in terms of students, courses and programmes, subject and vocational areas covered, buildings, facilities and locations. From the point of view of promoting learning, it is the diversity of students that is crucial. As our students are so diverse in terms of age, ethnic group, experience, attainments, intentions and capabilities, no single course structure or learning pattern could possibly suit them all. In order to enable each and every one to learn, FE colleges need to provide a wide range of learning opportunities and learning support services. Guidance and tutoring are indispensable elements of learning. So too are varied learning modes including lectures, tutorials, one-to-one sessions, workplace learning, and the various types of open learning.

By developing a simple three-phase model, the group was able to understand the various activities conducive to learning for all students at entry, during the programme and at exit. We were beginning to understand the realities of making learning happen in FE, and therefore how funding should be directed. Overall, the funding methodology would need to enable colleges to adopt the strategies and activities required for learning; to support colleges who wished to resource these things; and be capable of driving the change to learning-centred institutions where necessary.

The link between learning and funding

The reason funding methodology is so important in terms of promoting learning is that establishing the various activities at each phase of learning suggests and requires a particular form of internal resource management. The funding methodology carries messages about what the funding body thinks is important, which tends to be borne out in internal resource decisions. The present system, based on funding full-time equivalent numbers of students, has led to a focus on maximising group sizes and lecturers' loads to achieve efficiency in terms of student numbers throughout. As Mike Field has said:

> . . . neither the concept of FTE student numbers nor their application to determine funding levels are related in any way to what the students actually achieve as a result of that funding.
> (M Field *in* Fletcher, M *et al.* 1992)

Clearly, funding on FTE numbers does not preclude serious thinking about using the incoming resources to promote learning. The FTE unit of resource is simply a crude building-block of a college budget. By skilful resource management, money can be invested in the activities that characterise the three phases, and this has happened in well-known colleges such as Wirral, Milton Keynes and Croydon. Generally, however, unless funding is actually directed at these things, especially as resources become more constrained, items such as prior learning assessment, tutorial time and independent learning will inevitably be squeezed in favour of the norm of the classroom group. In this sense, the methodology is the message.

These concerns led the group to consider the effects of abandoning student numbers as a basis for funding and adopting some form of payment by results. The key question here is: 'what results?' The diversity of FE students is also reflected in their achievements. Some with learning difficulties or disabilities gain an increase in personal independence which represents as much personal achievement as those who move from, say BTEC National Diploma level to Higher National. Although there are now national frameworks in place for both vocational and academic qualifications, it was considered too crude to load funding totally onto terminal qualifications. Learning, after all, is about many achievements in a lifelong continuum and at the least colleges would need funding for smaller blocks than whole qualifications.

Despite these reservations, some element of funding linked to students' achievement seemed to be sensible, since it would give a powerful message about the importance of successful learning. Lumping all funding onto the end result, leaving aside the issue of definition, ducks the question of exactly what resources went into achieving that end. Since it would vary with different students and different subject areas, the group concluded that some method of varying the element of funding linked to achievement would be desirable. This thinking led to the notion that the exit phase of the learning model could be used to provide a flexible element of achievement-based funding. It was therefore renamed the 'achievement' state. This would also offer the possibility of ensuring that such an element was not so large as to exert pressure on colleges to exclude learners who did not initially look like good prospects for achievement, thereby compounding their disadvantage.

Towards a funding methodology to support learning

Based on the above analysis, it was possible to develop a funding methodology that:

(a) addresses the whole learning process;

(b) recognises student numbers as the basis of funding, but allows a form of weighting to account for the different aspects of the three phases of learning; and

(c) also allows a variable element for achievement.

This appears in **Funding learning** as funding based on units of provision per student (Option E). Apart from the achievement-based element, it is in some ways a form of 'weighted FTE' funding. The crucial difference is that the weightings are based on recognising the actual activities a college will provide at each of the phases of learning. What these activities ought to be is suggested, but precisely what they should be has been recommended by the resulting Tariff Advisory Committee (TAC).

The tariff sets out in each programme area and for each activity the number of units per student, showing the relative weightings clearly, see examples shown in **Figures 7** and **8**.

Each phase of learning has a number of activities which could be funded according to the tariff, e.g. induction, learning, assessment, tutoring.

Figure 7: Entry units

Entry element – units per student			
Learning programme of up to 10 basic on-programme units *per teaching year*	4.0	Learning programme of more than 10 basic on-programme *units per teaching year*	8.0

The new funding methodology is best understood as a framework which enables not government, but FE itself, to set out what will be recognised for funding and therefore valued, and what weights should be given to each activity. The key questions about resource efficiency become not 'what is your SSR, ACS, ALH?' but 'did you provide the number of students with the learning activities for which you were funded?' and 'did your students achieve what they set out to?' This methodology effectively enables the FEFC to operate funding in support of the twin objectives of more students and more achievements, whilst leaving the profession to define what it values as conducive to learning, and therefore to satisfying our customers. Although there will always remain the question of the total FE quantum available from the treasury, the distribution mechanism will at least support learning and achievement in an explicit way.

Funding learning does not simply consider what should be funded, but how funding should operate. Three key areas examined are as follows.

(i) **Volume of activity to be funded**: this will be based on a 'core and margin' allocation mechanism, guaranteeing colleges 90 per cent of their previous year's funding for 90 per cent of the units. Colleges will bid for the margin, which can include growth proposals beyond the previous year's volumes.

(ii) **Rate of funding**: all colleges will inherit a historical average level of funding. FEFC will set a national rate for marginal units which will enable progress to be made on converging funding levels in the interests of equity.

(iii) **Mechanism for controlling stability in funding**: this will depend on the core and margin approach. Clearly, if there are colleges that consistently fail to meet their targets, some form of 'claw-back' of funds will be necessary. FEFC is likely to take into account advice from its inspectorate in considering such action.

Figure 8: On-programme and achievement units

On-programme and achievement – units per student

		ON-PROGRAMME					ACHIEVEMENT	
Qualification aim	**Basic on-programme units**	**Cost factor 1.0**	**Cost factor 1.2**	**Cost factor 1.4**	**Cost factor 1.6**	**Supplement for 100% fee remission**	**Contribution to NTETs**	**Other primary learning goal**
		A	**B**	**C**	**D**			
BTEC National Diploma	168.0	168.0	201.6	235.2	268.8	66.6	20.0	N/A
BTEC National Certificate	65.5	65.5	78.6	91.7	104.8	26.0	7.9	N/A
BTEC First Diploma	84.0	84.0	100.8	117.6	134.4	33.3	10.0	N/A
BTEC First Certificate	35.3	35.3	42.4	49.4	56.5	14.0	4.2	N/A

These areas could be considered separately, and judgements about which method to use arrived at in terms of both equity between colleges and propensity to stimulate growth in student numbers. Each is important, but on its own does not address the key purpose of making learning happen. Funding based on units of provision, however, by separating the funding categories from the allocation process, enables each college to bid for, and be funded by, a simple 'one-line' budget – i.e. £x for y units. As the tariff is clear, the required distribution of resources across activities will be known for each student or student group recognised. In effect, subject to FEFC agreement, further education itself will be 'assigning rates', and how increased volumes of activity will be distributed will simply be linked to previous performance.

Perhaps the overwhelming advantage of funding based on units of provision is that it establishes a framework not simply to impose change, but to support it. Initially the bulk of funding will be loaded to the on-programme phase, with relatively small portions to entry activities and the achievement-based element. Entry and possibly achievement elements could be raised as colleges increasingly feel confident about investing in APL, learning centres, assessment centres, etc. Eventually the whole learning process will be addressed by funding as colleges change from the primacy of the classroom group to that of the learners' needs. This process will not just change learning; it will have an impact on the physical and human resources of the college in terms of what is valued and how the institution addresses the needs of its students. This road leads to redefinition of our operational priorities and managerial values in running our colleges. Since, for example, APL is an accepted activity in the tariff, there is no reason why this service should not be staffed, operated and advertised in the way courses are now. Those colleges wishing to reach out to their communities in new ways and to offer learning in new ways will know that, in principle, the tariff approach can accommodate them. Although the challenges are immense for FE, for the first time the funding methodology will offer support, not be an inhibitor.

At the time of writing it is too early to be clear about the full implications of this methodology. What is clear, however, is that learning and achievement are now centre-stage. So too is the concept that colleges are to be funded to do a job, and their funding depends on doing that job.

Colleges which are demonstrably successful will attract increasing funding. Those which are less so will be exposed, and will have choices to make about how best to secure improvements. In all of this there is a realism. It is the quality and sensitivity of our management of people and resources that will determine whether or not further education can succeed in helping the UK to achieve its world-class targets.

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Chapter 8: Colleges and companies

Andrea Spurling
Educational Consultant

Andrea Spurling has the advantage of viewing our education systems from a more detached and objective standpoint than most of us. She was a mature student in higher education, has lived abroad, and has been involved in research and consultancy for King's College Cambridge, for the Council for Industry and Higher Education, and for the National Association for Careers Education and Counselling.

She identifies the need for new models of association between education and industry in this country, and by implication warns us of the consequences of the failure to do so. She underlines a theme found elsewhere in this book – the necessity for genuine parity of esteem between academic and vocational qualifications – but shares the doubts of many of us that this can be achieved whilst we continue to see academic ability, as measured by A levels, as the paramount measure of intelligence. She warns that it is necessary to swim against a powerful cultural tide (comparisons with Patsy Fulton's account of the broad range of links between colleges and industry in America are instructive, and confirm the importance of the cultural differences – see chapter 10).

There are very clear messages both for FE colleges and for their partners in industry if we are to have any realistic hope of achieving national targets. Success will come only from new models, new directions: 'The old forms of students, teachers and managers are as useless as flattened motorway cones'.

Setting the scene

Certainty and change

Once upon a time, this side of infancy, the world was flat. This meant that at least you could see where you were going, even if the landscape tended towards monotony. School came first. Then – according to whether you were a boy or a girl, which social class you'd been born into, what sort of school you'd been to, what sort of examination results you'd got, where you lived, and who your father was if you had one – you went into employment, or apprenticeship, or training, or the services, or further or higher education, or unemployment, or motherhood. Then some modern-day Galileo said 'lo, we live on a globe that is going round in circles', and although a lot of people pooh-poohed the idea and went on behaving just as they always had, a horizon appeared and obscured the future.

For some time it was still possible to fumble along in a world of straight lines because there were grown-ups around who functioned like motorway cones, marking out the route. You could still tell who was what: students were young, randy and learned from books; teachers were old, sexless and taught from books; and managers – well, if managers didn't exactly manage at least they managed to cope for most of the time. Now, six years from the end of the millennium, the road is strewn with battered cones and global revolution affects us all. Colleges have been born again into a world in which certainties have been replaced by constant change, and where the most powerful tool is continuous learning.

Continuous learning: continuing education

Learning is what people do; education is what institutions deliver. **Figure 9** shows how continuous learning relates to education and training. As far as adult learners are concerned the distinctions used by institutions, sectors and funding bodies are more of a hindrance than a help, acting as barriers to the routes individuals need for continuous learning. Discussion of continuing education is hampered by differences of institutional definition and the historical ball-and-chain of educational status: higher? further? continuing? academic? vocational? adult? leisure? Regardless of how an institution defines a course, it is the prior experience of the individual learner that defines it as an element of pre-job education/training or of continuous learning. It is the continuous learner who integrates education and employment and who teaches the importance of putting the learning, not institutional organisation, at the centre.

Figure 9: Lifelong learning

1 0 – 5 years:
Pre-school play groups; nursery school

2 5 – 16 years:
Compulsory schooling

3 16+ years:
Pre-job education and training:

- 3.1 FE/HE in schools, colleges and universities immediately following compulsory schooling;
- 3.2 Youth Training, Employment Training and other government 16+ schemes;
- 3.3 employers' initial education and training for school-leaver recruits, in-company and on college/university courses;
- 3.4 initial training required by professional bodies.

4 16+ years:
First job:

- – covering first continuous stint of employment or unemployment following compulsory schooling/pre-job education and training.

5 Thereafter (at whatever age):

- 5.1 on-the-job (job specific; company-specific; continuing education/professional development);
- 5.2 between jobs (continuing education/professional development; re-training; updating; upskilling);
- 5.3 personal development and recreation.

NB The classification in (4) of unemployment as 'first job' reflects the difference between **employment** and **work**. For many people official unemployment includes continuous labour, unpaid or in the black economy. To make the next career move they need well-developed skills of negotiation, management and self-marketing.

This model is developed from an original by Kenneth Dixon, member of the Council for Industry and Higher Education.

Employers and learning

Developing an integrated model

To replace the tandem model of education-before-employment with one in which the components are thoroughly integrated needs only half a revolution: the whole system needs to be turned through 180 degrees and stood on its head.

Under the established system, employees in Britain receiving most of the vocational education and training on offer are under 25, have good A level scores, and come from the most advantaged socio-economic backgrounds (see **Figures 10, 11** and **12**). Questions of equity apart, this pattern is totally inadequate in the face of changes affecting companies.

Eighty per cent of the workforce that will be available in AD 2000 is already available for work today. The very familiarity of this statistic is beginning to reduce the impact of its implications. It is not a question of whether or not there is something intrinsically magical about the year 2000: use another calendar, after all, and you get another date. Its significance is that the rate of turnover of the workforce is slowing down. When the patterns and content of employment are changing as quickly as they are, and the source of young recruits is reducing, more and older people must be attracted to education and training. This includes people who were effectively rejected during compulsory schooling, and who have consequently rejected formal learning as irrelevant to them.

Many of Britain's industrial competitors are developing national systems for lifelong learning. In Japan, Germany, the USA, France and Sweden, formal education is part of a system that embraces formal and informal learning in institutions, the workplace, community centres, public places and the home. Lifelong learning uses delivery systems that extend beyond institutional boundaries, providing learning opportunities for people across the breadth and throughout the length of their lives – developments of the sort and on the scale exemplified by the Open University in Britain. A national system for lifelong learning integrates education and employment, through continuous learning, as a way of establishing and maintaining economic activity. It is especially necessary as the recession begins a slow retreat, leaving large numbers of people high and dry with insufficient and/or inappropriate education and training.

Figure 10: Participation in vocational education and training by age

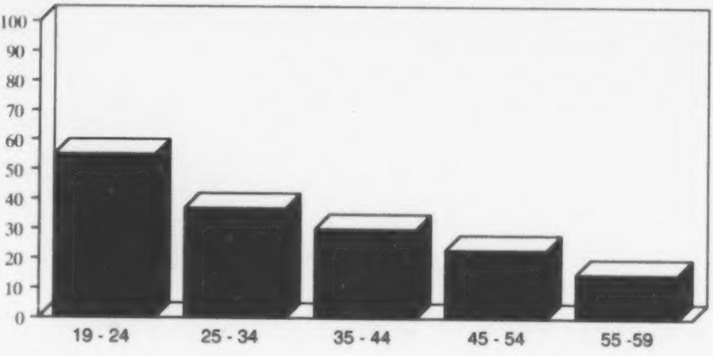
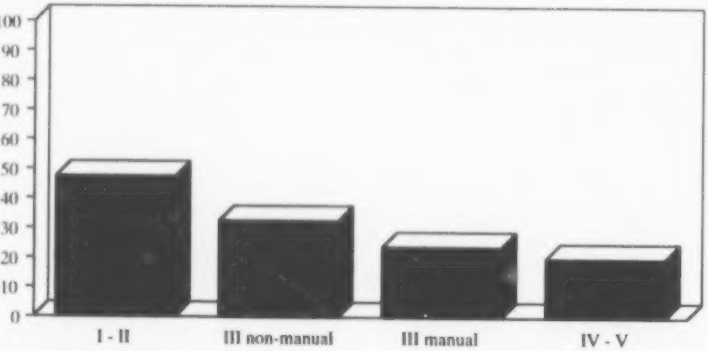
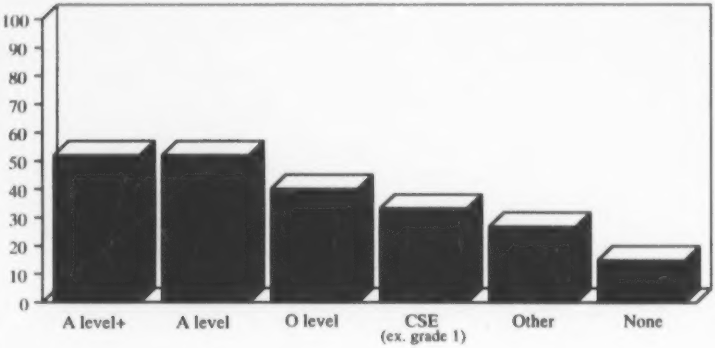


Figure 11: Participation in vocational education and training by social class



Source: **Training in Britain** (1989)

Figure 12: Proportion of employees receiving vocational education and training, by highest educational level



Source: **Training in Britain 1989**

Inappropriate education

The current emphasis of government funding on the FE sector is an old urgency newly acknowledged. Colleges have a key role in delivering what most people need for continuous learning. The legacy of a state education based on academic criteria and the irrelevant culture of public schools is the decline of manufacturing craft skills, reflected and aggravated by differential rewards in employment. In Britain, intellectual skills in industry have been increased at the cost of craft skills while other nations show that the two are not mutually exclusive ('industry' is used here in its broadest sense to include manufacturing and service industry, business and commerce). The spiralling effects of inappropriate education exact a high price, individually and nationally.

> . . . two thirds of workers in Britain have no vocational or professional qualification compared with only a quarter in Germany and a third in the Netherlands. The weakness is not in terms of graduates, but at the basic technical and craft support levels . . . there are consequences for productivity, earning power, workmanship and service; in short, the quality of life. Moreover, with the rising skills levels required in employment there will

> be an increasing tendency for the unqualified to get left out of the economy and to become first long-term unemployed and then unemployable. (Smithers and Robinson 1993)

National Vocational Qualifications

There is a new focus on work-related education. A national system of qualifications, unambiguously identified as vocational – National Vocational Qualifications – has been developed as an alternative to the academic A levels. It is an attempt to promote parity of esteem between academic and vocational qualifications. However, the continuing existence of A levels indicates the extent to which academic ability has taken root as the paramount measure of intelligence in Britain. Comparison with other countries shows that:

- academic qualifications do not have to be used as the absolute standard for pupils' powers of intelligence;
- non-academic employers do not have to use academic examination results as criteria for recruitment;
- there is no intrinsic reason why creativity should not be ranked with theoretical understanding in industry (and every reason why it should);
- technicians' institutes and polytechnics could have achieved maturity in their own right if they had not succumbed to academic drift; and
- if employers had genuinely valued technical skills and rewarded them accordingly, technical careers could have developed in parallel with management careers to the most senior levels.

All this was a matter of choice, and no system of vocational qualification will be as esteemed as A levels unless institutions and employers choose to make it so. It is swimming against a powerful cultural tide.

Employee development

The picture shown in **Figure 12** represents a major challenge: how to get more education and training to more people, not just to those who already have the most. The most influential development, in terms of the volume of uptake and rate of progress, is where colleges and companies working together have recognised the learning habit itself, over and above its content, as the key to growth and development. Collaborations in delivering programmes for employee development have successfully attracted non-learners to learning by:

- helping employees to identify what they would like to learn about, regardless of its immediate work-related value;

- providing guidance to help employees choose something in which they are likely to succeed, difficult enough to represent progress but not so hard as to be discouraging;

- providing facilities for them to learn at times and in places to fit in with their work and other commitments (increasingly on the work site, rather than in college);

- providing financial assistance.

Individual small companies do not have the resources or critical mass to establish their own employee development programmes, but in some localities consortia of TECs, local authorities and colleges have been established to provide employee development programmes on a regional basis.

Work-based learning

Successful companies now know that survival in the long-term depends on the people they employ being continuously involved in learning. Partnerships between colleges and companies have shown that work-based learning, and the use of open and distance learning, can dramatically increase the efficiency of time spent on continuing education and training. The turn-round time between employee-as-trainee and employee-as-producer has not just been reduced, it has been collapsed into a process that serves learning and earning simultaneously. 'Real' commercial work is increasingly used as the basis for learning, assessed and validated as units which accumulate over a period, and which can be 'cashed in' for formal qualifications. NVQs or academic qualifications can be used as currency, depending on suitability.

This kind of learning grows exponentially. Work-based learning may be assessed for accreditation by people who are primarily teachers (college employees) or managers (company employees). These assessors will themselves need more or less training to carry out the accreditation, depending on their experience, and this training may in its turn be accredited in their own programme of continuing professional development.

A greater sharing of people, experience and ideas between colleges and their local business communities underpins regional strength. Working together they have the potential to identify and develop the continuing education and training most appropriate to the needs of a region and its industries.

Colleges in business

Dual identity

Education is wealth creating: it improves the earning potential of learners; its institutions stimulate the local economy; and it can be sold in dollops of different size and flavour in home and overseas markets. Colleges are major employers in many localities in terms of the number of people they employ, and major customers in terms of the size of plant to be run, equipment to be maintained, goods and services supplied. As educational institutions they are complex organisations with a dual identity.

1 As non-exclusive educational institutions they teach by practice and example; they have to find a workable balance in meeting the moral, ethical, cultural, religious and political expectations of the internal communities they create, and of the external communities (local and national) that they serve.

2 As businesses they must be commercially successful in providing the education, development and training that meets the needs of their customers (internal and external):

- paid and voluntary workers of all grades across the institution (non-teaching and teaching staff, managers at all levels, governors);
- students;
- public and private sector employers;
- professional institutions;
- voluntary bodies and community groups;
- local and national government.

In both its roles the quality of a college's relationships with its local and regional communities is critical. To gain the confidence of these communities a college must be seen to listen, and to respond to what it hears. It can do this by:

- helping people in the communities to articulate their learning needs (as learners/employers/service providers);
- providing a forum for that articulation, to involve interested parties;
- having people who can respond to learners' needs involved in governing and managing the college;
- having the resources to do the job in a way that satisfies the needs of learners and the commercial requirements of the institution.

'Interested parties' and 'people who can respond to learners' needs' include local employers in the private and public sector, as well as college representatives. This is a time when a cultural cross-over is taking place to an unprecedented degree. Professional management has come to the colleges as learning blossoms in the workplace.

Staff development

Staff development and continuous learning, in colleges and in companies, are two sides of the same coin. Whatever their sector of work, college staff are likely to need skills that combine aspects of learning, teaching, research (whether or not for accreditation) and business efficiency.

Those whose primary job is teaching need to be able to work with older adult learners, typically highly motivated and whose experience may include industrial management, as well as with students in the 16–19 age range. They need to be able to brief potential customers from industry on what the college can offer as a service for general or specific continuing education and employee development. This goes beyond marketing existing courses to discussing customers' needs, helping to design a customised service, and being able to deliver it equally effectively within or outside the institution.

In areas such as catering, hairdressing and construction, departmental heads already have experience of running commercial enterprises for their institutions. As colleges follow the trend in industry, introducing flatter management structures, more staff are likely to find themselves becoming involved in unfamiliar aspects of professional management, from departmental budget management to institutional strategic planning. It all indicates the need for continuous staff development across a range of areas not necessarily connected with teaching or specialist subjects.

The national Investors in People (IIP) standard for staff development and training is as suitable for teaching institutions as it is for any other professionally managed business. The standard is managed by Training and Enterprise Councils in England and Local Enterprise Companies in Scotland on behalf of the Employment Department. It requires:

- commitment at the most senior level to investment in regular staff training and development;
- evidence of regular reviews of staff development needs;
- access to staff development and training for all employees, from recruitment and throughout employment; and
- evaluation of the college's investment in training and development, to assess what it has achieved and to see how it can be made more effective in the future.

EU funding

Whether they are providing a service for internal customers (staff and students) or external customers (companies, private and public sector organisations, students), colleges need easy access to information about European Union funding they might use, and they need to know how to make applications with the minimum expense of time and the maximum chance of success. In some regions, institutions, employers and local authorities have formed consortia (sometimes with TECs/LECs, sometimes independently) to pool resources and information and to provide a guidance service for making applications. Such groups create a valuable network of contacts across sector boundaries in a region.

Co-operation

Co-operation among colleges and universities greatly enhances the efficiency of management and use of funding within a region. In some localities college principals and vice-chancellors meet regularly to discuss the education and training needs of the communities they serve, sharing ideas and planning the most effective response and efficient use of the funds available to them as regional providers.

What can industry do?

Contributing skills

Now more than ever the professional skills of industrial managers are valuable to colleges. The FEFC requires colleges to formulate strategic plans, and the experience of company managers is invaluable to college governing bodies whose members may never have been involved in such an exercise. Companies that encourage their managers to become college governors are helping to improve professionalism in further education, and to maintain the efficiency and relevance of education and training to individuals and employers in the region.

New standards

A willingness among managers to work for the IIP standard provides valuable contact with college staff, with long term benefits spreading beyond the scheme itself. It also provides a basis for working with staff from the TECs/LECs as managers of the scheme.

Commitment to IIP is likely to mean that managers will need to familiarise themselves with developments post-dating their own experience in education and training, such as NVQs. The more that the new qualifications are used in company programmes for employee education and development, the sooner they will become established as a genuine currency for vocational qualification, helping employees to reach higher levels of qualification. The sooner that happens, the sooner the use of academic examination results for recruitment in areas where they are not relevant will be reduced.

Into the new millennium

Models from the past have limitations as guides to an unpredictable future. The old forms of students, teachers and managers are as useless as flattened motorway cones. The colleges that are shaping the future are those that collaborate with employers in helping people to be managers and students; students and teachers; teachers and managers. What they all need now is the support of a sound national system of impartial guidance – but that's another story.

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Chapter 9: Equal opportunities and further education

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We often say about our colleges that they place the student at the centre of the organisation. We can sometimes produce graphics which appear to prove or at least illustrate this claim. In practice, individual students too often and perhaps too willingly come a poor second to institutional efficiency, neat structures and historical paradigms of courses, groups and classes. Yet if equal opportunities means anything worthwhile, it is that difference is celebrated, and diversity acknowledged. Keith Wymer's extended analysis of the implications for a college of constructing the whole system on the identification and meeting of individual need puts the topic into a context which is at once clear and compelling. As he points out, equal opportunities policies are not grafted on to the body collegiate, nor are they luxuries which can be indulged in when they can be afforded.

Much of our education system, and by no means only the college part of it, depends upon assumptions of status and gradations of esteem. Academic study has been deemed to be more worthwhile than vocational education, which in turn is more respectable than training. Higher education, however loosely defined and however unmonitored as to its quality, is treated differently and more favourably than further education.

Keith Wymer reminds us of the central place of equality of opportunity in every aspect of college activities, and he identifies the source from which the major streams of curriculum, resourcing and personnel policies develop.

This chapter is not primarily about equal opportunities policy statements: it is a safe assumption that most colleges have them. Where they have limited impact, this will have more to do with their relationship to management and curriculum practice than the statements themselves. The purpose here is to examine how far development is restricted by structures and attitudes that ignore equal opportunities factors.

Historical background

Further education colleges have an impressive record of providing opportunities for people who leave school unqualified. Self-help by attending night school has a history going back to the days of Samuel Smiles himself (**Self-help** was published in 1859). After the Education Act 1944, day release from employment increased steadily, but growth was largely in specific occupational areas. For example, engineering, construction and textiles established strong day or block release traditions, strengthened by active industrial training boards which were established by the Industrial Training Act 1964.

The 1944 Education Act's intention of day release for all under 18 not in full-time education (in county colleges offering a broad curriculum) never became a reality. The modest growth in the 1950s and 60s was almost entirely to meet the needs of employers. Students who wished to select their own courses continued to attend evening classes.

The most significant development after 1960 was the increase in full-time students, mainly 15–18 year olds. In addition to GCE O and A levels, colleges offered vocational courses, the subjects depending on the employment opportunities in the area. Initially, most students were from secondary modern schools. When comprehensive schools opened they established sixth forms, with varying consequences. Some offered only GCE A levels, so students enrolled in colleges for GCE O level repeats and vocational courses. Elsewhere, open access sixth forms were developed, leaving colleges to compete and/or develop part-time courses.

The pattern that evolved made less contribution to equal opportunities than is generally assumed. Colleges competed with sixth forms for the qualified instead of developing curricula for low attainers. In practice there was a choice between sixth form and college for the well-qualified, but no relevant curriculum for 'the other half' (Newsom Report 1963). One consequence was that governments (Conservative and Labour) concluded they could not trust LEAs to educate unemployed teenagers. Funding was channelled from the Department of

Employment through the Manpower Services Commission and its successors (Training Agency, TEED). This is the background to the role of the TECs today.

The divisions (e.g. between education and training, sixth forms and colleges) continue to hinder equal opportunities. Few schools offer as wide a range of A levels as their local colleges: even fewer have a reasonable range of vocational options. For a variety of reasons, genuine choice between one sixth form and another, or between a sixth form and a college, has little reality for most school leavers.

As early as the 1960s, a few LEAs recognised that duplication could be avoided by tertiary colleges: sole providers of full- and part-time education. Others combined sixth forms in sixth form colleges, which operated alongside colleges of further education. Progress towards equal opportunities depended on whether colleges were selective or had open access. Open access might be thought to be synonymous with tertiary but in practice this was not necessarily the case. In some areas, applicants were considered insufficiently qualified for a college and directed to a Youth Training Scheme. It was not uncommon for YTS work in colleges to be managed separately; sometimes in separate buildings and with instructors rather than qualified lecturers.

Although opportunities improved with coherent and unified systems, the national picture continued to be one of division and competition. Sometimes students had a bewildering range of options: FE colleges, sixth form colleges, school sixth forms, Department of Employment training schemes. The creation of a national system by the Further and Higher Education Act 1992 is a step towards a unified system, although sixth forms and training remain outside it. The bringing together of FE colleges and sixth form colleges enables the new corporations, within the context of government policies, to determine their plans and priorities for equal opportunities.

Prospects for equal opportunities

What are the prospects for equal opportunities? The Act itself, and the White Paper (DES *et al.* 1991) on which it is based, are (at best) neutral. As there are no specified resources for ethnic minorities, women or the disabled, the situation may deteriorate – at least in the short-term. Local authorities are unlikely to continue grants (e.g. for the unemployed) when they no longer control colleges.

Education and training for the 21st century

Against this, it is necessary to consider the consequences of government policies, whatever their intention. The priority is a 25 per cent increase in enrolments in three years, to bring Britain to the level of other advanced industrial nations. The additional resources promised could assist equal opportunities – if distributed in accordance with need, rather than taking into account historical factors.

The threat to equal opportunities in the short-term is that an attempt will be made to reach the 25 per cent target without investment in the curriculum for the unqualified. If a short-term view is adopted, the strategy will be to reach targets by providing more of the same. This will leave unresolved the means of enrolling ethnic minorities, women with family commitments, people with learning difficulties. Targets will be reached without evening-up regional variations in participation. In better off areas, the participation rate for 16–18 year olds will rise to over 90 per cent, but only to around 60 per cent in some poor areas. With adults, the increases will be largely outside working class communities, where the vast majority of the unqualified and unemployed reside.

Equal opportunities requires genuine open access throughout the country. This assumes targeting resources to more deprived areas and groups. The FEFC's funding mechanism will obviously be a major factor, as will government action on student support – maintenance grants, tuition fees, travel expenses, child care allowances, examination expenses. Parity of treatment for part-time students is also a crucial equal opportunities issue.

Where are we now?

Although the percentage staying on at 16 has risen in recent years, the figures merit careful study. Full-time participation has increased, while part-time day release has declined. If those on private sector training schemes are included, the participation rate in education and training for 16 year olds is over 80 per cent. Yet close examination reveals a situation far short of equal opportunities for all.

Firstly, there are wide regional variations, from under 50 to over 80 per cent. Also, some people opt for training schemes rather than college courses only because they need training allowances. Most serious of all, a Youthaid survey in 1993 found that around 100,000 of those who left school in 1992 were in neither a job, nor education, nor training. There are varying explanations for the substantial number of outsiders, but the one that concerns us here is the denial of access to suitable education and training.

If the participation rate at 16 is now closer to that of our industrial competitors, this is a recent development and the parity does not apply beyond 17. Britain still lags far behind most European countries in the proportion of the workforce with qualifications. There are no statutory grants for full-time students outside higher education, while day release has never had more than marginal relevance to adults.

Access to higher education courses is one of the successes of the 1980s. Yet, as with staying on at 16, there are wide regional variations in participation rates. Some LEAs pay tuition fees and maintenance grants. Elsewhere, under the 21 hour rule, students are able to study and draw benefit, although there is a lack of consistency in the Department of Social Security's interpretation of the rules. The withdrawal of benefit when people enrol for full-time study is one of the main barriers to access for adults.

Part-time day participation by the adult unemployed increased in the late 1980s. Again, opportunities vary from area to area, depending on the LEA's policies on tuition fees, examination fees, child care. Where the level of unemployment is high, the demand for places is greater than the funding available. As with school leavers, some take Department of Employment training schemes, rather than college courses, only because training allowances are available. The White Paper **Education and training for the 21st century** (DES *et al.* 1991) was clearly written in ignorance of the fact that the majority of students in further education are adults. Although this is now recognised by the Department for Education and the Further Education Funding Council, there are major difficulties in progressing towards equal opportunities. The most absurd in terms of curriculum is the distinction, in the Further and Higher Education Act 1992, between vocational and non-vocational study. Here is another division determined by statute, restricting access.

This is the context within which the new corporations must develop their strategic plans. They must recognise that the doubts about the ability of colleges to meet the needs of the unqualified, which resulted in funding being channelled through the Department of Employment, were not without foundation. A great deal of staff and curriculum development is both necessary and urgent to ensure equality at the point of entry to the system. However appropriate the curriculum, many will be unable to participate until the government addresses satisfactorily the issue of student support.

Priorities for college management

Equal opportunities statements have frequently been formulated as an add-on to long established policies. In the 1980s they were often hastily devised to complete applications for funding to the then Manpower Services Commission, or the European Social Fund. A priority for the new corporations is to assess how far statements on gender, race, disability and sexual orientation have become integral elements of colleges' overall policies. Open access is meaningless without targeting where access is denied or restricted. Equal opportunities statements are of no more than academic interest without an open access context.

As both open access and equal opportunities are almost universally endorsed, it is essential to bring some precision and rigour to their definition. A college's policy is genuinely open access only if there are plans for education for all at 16+. This may not be an immediate possibility but a policy must be considered of doubtful genuineness if it is not a medium- rather than long-term objective. The same applies to identified inequalities: their removal must be planned in a specified period. There are no institutions without restrictions on access and without inequalities. An open access, equal opportunities college is one that has plans, regularly updated, to remove them. Equal opportunities is often considered to be a matter of changing attitudes. The most effective means of demonstrating the need for change is accurate, relevant information; for example, on the number of women in senior management positions or the number of black students on engineering courses. The aim must be to involve all staff and ensure that monitoring extends throughout the institution.

Equal opportunities targets cannot be achieved unless managed with the same emphasis as management information systems, or the achievement of financial and enrolment targets. This implies allocation of adequate resources. The challenge for management is that more resources for equal opportunities means decisions, not likely to be popular, for reductions elsewhere. If a college's response is 'we will implement equal opportunities policies only if we are given additional funding' there is a lack of seriousness about the policy.

Most colleges do not have sufficient relevant information about their staff, students or communities. Raw data – percentage of ethnic minorities, male/female breakdown, number of students with disabilities – is a necessary but insufficient base. There are colleges with an appropriate (in terms of the areas they serve) overall percentage of ethnic minority students, but with none on some courses.

Without a detailed breakdown of students on courses it is impossible to determine targets. Without targets, it is impossible to monitor progress. Clearly, ethnic and gender information and monitoring must be taken fully into account in plans to acquire management information, and in the development of management information systems. As there are no national requirements, from either the Department for Education or the FEFC, progress depends on college initiative.

Information on staff is equally important. Having the same percentage of males and females has little significance if there are no women in senior positions. The same applies to ethnic minority representation, although the population of the locality will also be a relevant factor.

It must be assumed that all colleges will have policy statements on equal opportunities, gender, race, disability, sexual orientation. Their implementation will depend heavily on procedures to support them. It is, however, prudent to consider the implications for existing procedures. One approach is to modify grievance procedures to take account of, for example, sexual and racial harassment. Progress is obviously easier with the co-operation of trade unions that share the same objectives.

The credibility of colleges' equal opportunities policies depends a great deal on their practices. A staff selection procedure that addresses gender and ethnic balance at all levels, including senior management, is a priority. Removing inequalities in the staffing sphere is easier in periods of expansion but extremely difficult where staff reductions are required. It must also be recognised that traditional job descriptions often have an inbuilt, albeit subtle, bias towards white males. Modifications of job descriptions to take account of open access objectives will often result in new and improved opportunities for women and ethnic minorities.

An equal opportunities curriculum

Broadening the curriculum to meet the unsatisfied needs of the unqualified, ethnic minorities and people with various learning difficulties requires staff with relevant experience and training. Traditional teacher training followed by teaching on academic courses is not helpful background and experience. However much is achieved in terms of suitable new appointments, a comprehensive staff development policy to bring all on board is a priority. There is no place in further education today for people who are capable of no more than the relatively easy task of teaching at GCE A level. The shape of the FE curriculum has been determined by two groups of traditions.

Some colleges which developed through successful competition with schools continue to be strongly influenced by the grammar school/university, academic tradition. Although the majority have added BTEC and higher education access accreditation in recent years, a significant number have little relevant full-time provision for Newsom's 'other half'. The approach to marketing is sometimes such that very few of the unqualified apply and when they do, they may fail to meet the entry requirements of all existing courses.

In other colleges the dominant influence is the vocational tradition, which evolved to satisfy employers' needs, and was perpetuated by the industrial training boards. These narrow traditions have been sustained where vocational departments, short of work through the decline of day release, have undertaken schemes for the unemployed, supported formerly by the MSC and now by the TECs.

Vocational schemes, frequently employer- rather than college-based, have been the means by which some working class people have got a foot on the ladder. But this has tended to be a narrow vocational ladder, where for want of appropriate personal development education only a minority get beyond the lower rungs.

The academic tradition, developed in grammar schools in the context of the traditional universities, and the vocational tradition, developed to satisfy employers, have been slow to adapt in response to economic and social changes. Without major modification they are of limited value, even to the students who succeed. They have also had a distorting effect in some colleges on new curricula such as those for BTEC courses and access to higher education courses. The main damage results from the fact that they operate in the context of historical and arbitrary criteria and respond very slowly to changing education and training needs. GCE A levels have been left outside systems seeking to establish an otherwise integrated curriculum, not for any educational reason, but to preserve an avenue to higher education for a social élite.

The academic route has no relevance to the immediate needs of the unqualified, and entry arrangements usually exclude them anyway. People who leave school without qualifications are often considered to deserve nothing more than vocational training for lower level jobs. This is clearly an élitist rather than an equal opportunities perspective. It also fails to provide students/trainees with enough personal educational development to complete vocational courses at the level required by modern industry. It is vocational traditions which have determined the NVQ approach, favoured by government policy, when the open college/access approach is more appropriate for meeting the needs of both individuals and the economy.

The major challenge – to provide education and training opportunities for those previously denied access – cannot be met through the academic and vocational traditions. Associated with them are traditional forms of marketing and curriculum management. The content is frequently inappropriate: for example, by being too remote from experience in the case of academic courses, or irrelevant where vocational schemes operate for the unemployed in a manner that is meaningful only to people in employment. In summary, these groups of traditions are too remote from the experiences of people living in working class (including ethnic minority) communities. Even when they start on a scheme, usually because it is the only means of obtaining a training allowance, the majority do not get very far.

The most relevant group of education traditions for unqualified, predominantly working class people is in community education. This has developed on the margins of the state system, for example in adult education services, or outside it. For most working class people, education in the communities where they live is more valuable than what they are offered at school. The volume of education taking place in trade unions, churches, chapels, temples, youth clubs and community centres is seriously underestimated by national and local bureaucracy, even when the bureaucrats are aware of its existence. In many inner city areas, education in Asian temples and Afro-Caribbean chapels is the most useful type of education for these minorities.

Such education receives varying degrees of support from public funds, sometimes through LEA adult and community education services, and (during the 1980s) from the MSC/Training Agency through YTS community projects and the community programme for adults. The education provided is not non-vocational, although it is often described as such because the link with the state system is through adult education services. For thousands of people it is the only means to acquire sufficient basic and general education to be able to cope on vocational schemes. Most of this work is seriously underfunded, with a deterioration in recent years as a result of reductions in resources for both LEA adult education and the funding available for training on youth and adult schemes sponsored by the Department of Employment, now through the TECs.

The best route towards equal opportunities provision for most colleges is support for this kind of outreach work. The most serious mistake is to try to take over this education, rather than enter into partnerships with the organisations involved. Successful partnerships depend entirely on the involvement of colleges – management, staff, students – in the communities they serve. Involvement to a degree where the members of the organisations become confident about working with a college depends on a willingness to share and assist with problems not traditionally considered to be educational. The staff with the most appropriate experience are likely to be those with an adult education/training or community development background. It is here that the essence of equal opportunities provision becomes evident. It is in recognising that access is about much more than overcoming academic hurdles. Large numbers of people, from school-leavers to mature adults, will participate only if courses and projects are available where they are prepared to go. Colleges must be prepared to meet them and, in many cases, half-way will not do.

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Chapter 10: The American community college and its links with industry

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The United States has provided some stimulating experiences for people working in British FE in recent years. In 1989 the editors of this book heard George Bush avow, in one of his better speeches, that 'there is no such thing as an expendable student'. The American community colleges were built on the educational faith of access and progression, and have achieved a deservedly high and worldwide reputation. They have benefited greatly from operating in a culture in which education and qualifications are valued more highly than they are in this country, and also from the degree of articulation that exists between the community colleges and the universities in the US.

Although community colleges are typically much less concerned with vocational training than we are in FE in Britain, one of their strengths has been a very close working relationship with industry. Both by generous support through sponsorship and assistance to students, and by well-developed collaborative ventures, industry in America demonstrates its own commitment to the work of the colleges and to human resource development. Some or indeed all of the examples here will make most British managers distinctly envious, and they underline a fundamental difference between our two cultures. A key difference is that in the US the partnerships are often led by educationalists.

Patsy Fulton has had great success as President and as Chancellor of leading colleges in Texas and Michigan. There are many aspects of the community college experience that are highly relevant to FE in Britain, but she writes here, as invited, specifically on the links with industry and addresses some familiar issues in her conclusions.

From the inception of community colleges in the United States, a major part of the mission has been to provide career programmes which culminate in employment opportunities for students. This training has traditionally been from slightly over 30 credit hours (usually one year), resulting in the student being granted a certificate, to in excess of 60 credit hours (usually two years), resulting in the student receiving an associate degree. Advisory committees composed of representatives from business and industry have been an integral part of these programmes. The role of the advisory committees has been basically curricular in nature, i.e. advising on the relevance of course content and industry trends which demand new courses or modules. Peripheral roles have included identifying placement opportunities for graduates, and acting in a consulting capacity on equipment needed for programmes.

Changes in the industry – education relationship

With advisory committees required as part of accreditation standards for all programmes, this relationship remains viable, but has taken on a much more dynamic and collaborative tone. Change has been necessitated by the needs of both industry and education. These changes include:

- **Greater educational requirements for entry-level jobs**: projections show that by the year 2000 over 75 per cent of jobs will require education beyond high school, but not necessarily a baccalaureate.

- **Career and job changes**: due to the rapidity of technological change and the importance of a global rather than a national economy, it is projected that the average worker will change jobs seven to eight times, and will change careers as many as four times within a lifetime.

- **Underprepared workers**: significant percentages of students are graduating from American high schools with few jobs skills and limited communication and mathematics skills.

- **Downsizing of industry**: in order to survive, industry giants such as General Motors, AT and T, and IBM have been forced to downsize and re-evaluate the way they deliver their products or services. A spin-off having an impact on community colleges has been the fact that many companies no longer maintain large training departments, and are seeking other avenues for job training or retraining of their workers.

- **Decline of educational resources**: the continual decline of financial resources at the community college level demands that creative solutions be sought for meeting programme needs. No longer can the community college exist in isolation; it must seek collaborations with industry to allow the levering of resources for both entities.

Collaborative models

The existing models of industry/community college collaborations in the United States are diverse, but several identifiable trends have emerged. Presented here are a number of those trends, representative of collaborations found in community colleges across the nation. Specific examples, relating to collaborations at Oakland Community College (OCC) in Oakland County, Michigan, are given in several cases, for clarity.

Specialised courses

Specialised courses are designed in co-operation with industry to meet the specific needs of workers. The general pattern is to work with industry to develop the course content and the outcome expectations. The industry may also collaborate with the community college in identifying the instructor, who may be an employee of the industry. The community college usually pays the instructor's salary, but there are instances where the instructor is paid by the industry. The courses may be offered at either the college or the industry site. Successful completion of these courses may result in college credit, or the award of continuing education units to the students.

Equipment and course materials may be provided by the industry. For example, Oakland Community College presently maintains a collaboration with Electronic Data Systems for which the college reconfigured a room at one of its campuses to accommodate EDS's needs. EDS has provided software, totalling more than one million dollars, as a gift to the college. The centre trains General Motors Corporation employees in computer-aided design by day, and non-GM personnel at night. OCC faculty members are also being trained in the centre, enabling them to integrate this advanced body of knowledge into other college curricula. Since the programme's inception 10 months ago, 70 classes have been offered.

Through a collaborative arrangement with IBM, OCC's integrated manufacturing programme has been given more than three million dollars in equipment, software and services. OCC has also benefited from collaborations with many other firms, resulting in loans or outright gifts of advanced software and devices including scanning equipment, computer-integrated manufacturing equipment, machine tools and computer welding equipment.

Internship programmes

Internship programmes through which students attend college for a period of study, then work in industry, are common examples of community college collaborations. An example of an extremely successful internship programme at OCC is the culinary arts apprenticeship. In the programme, students attend college for nine hours per week and work in the culinary arts industry for 40 to 50 hours per week. Successful completion includes 66 hours of college credit and 6,000 hours of work experience, leading to a journeyman's card (US Department of Labour certification). By enrolling for an additional nine hours of credit these students are able to earn an associate degree.

Another common internship programme found across the nation is in the automotive industry. In a typical programme the student alternates between studying for eight weeks, and working full-time in the industry for 98 weeks. The automotive industry has been extremely supportive of these programmes, providing engines, parts, entire automobiles, educational materials, and even graduation dinners for the students and their families. Upon graduation, the industry helps to place the students in jobs.

Small business centres

There are many specialised centres that help small businesses to get started by offering courses in planning, accounting procedures, marketing, loan packaging, personnel policies and technology applications. OCC has taken collaboration to another level by working with Walsh College, an upper division business college, to establish a Business Enterprise Development Centre. The purpose of the BEDC is to provide small or recently established firms with business counselling, specialised assistance, training and other information which enhances profitability. Over 1,400 clients in southeast Michigan have been aided by the BEDC since its establishment in 1990.

Government/education/business collaborations

These collaborations are becoming more common as our local, state and federal governments recognise the importance of assisting job training efforts through the earmarking of special funds. Examples in Michigan include state provision of funds to community colleges, on a competitive basis, for job training. OCC was able to garner 2,500,000 dollars in one year to provide training opportunities for industry. The proposals for these projects were written jointly with the industry, and have very specific target audiences and outcomes.

Another collaborative project which is being led by OCC is a consortium with a university in our area (Oakland University), and various small manufacturers, to bring a Manufacturing Applications and Education Centre to Oakland County. The project will be funded by the federal government, state government and local manufacturers to compete in national and international markets. The university will benefit from access to larger and better research facilities.

Tech prep initiatives

Collaborations have been established between high schools, community colleges and industry to create a seamless educational experience for students, beginning at the tenth or eleventh grade levels. Curricula are articulated between the high school and community college, with specific outcomes that allow the student to progress in a planned fashion from one learning experience to the next. When these programmes are articulated with business, the student will generally work in the industry for several weeks while attending school, and then become a full-time employee of the business following graduation. OCC is presently working in concert with 28 local public school districts to meet current and future employment needs in such growing fields as drafting and design, medical assisting, and business information systems.

Displaced worker programmes

In a volatile environment where industry is downsizing, many workers face unemployment. For example, in the Michigan area alone there are presently over 14,000 displaced workers from one automobile industry. Industry and the community colleges are working together to provide training programmes to prepare these workers to change careers. Monetary assistance is usually available from the industry.

Restricted degree programmes

Some businesses have worked with community colleges to establish specialised degree programmes for their employees. Three such degree programmes presently exist at OCC; manufacturing technology degrees for the Dana and CDI Corporations, and an electromechanical degree for General Motors (offered in co-operation with the Rochester Institute of Technology and Michigan Technological University). These programmes vary in structure, but usually take the employees from two to two and a half years to complete. Credit in these programmes is also articulated with senior institutions so that the employees may proceed to a bachelor's degree, or beyond, if they desire.

Business and professional institutes

Many community colleges across the nation have targeted the delivery of services to various segments of the business community through the establishment of specialised organisations, often called 'business and professional institutes'. Through these organisational structures a multiplicity of services is provided to industry. The major function of a B and PI is to provide short-term courses to industry. The B and PI is structured to respond quickly to the market demands of industry, often delivering specialised-content courses within two or three weeks of an initial request. Courses are generally non-credit, but credit can be provided if the industry desires. Another function of some institutes is to establish 'incubators' for small businesses. Although the services provided in the incubator environment vary, the business is generally offered a small physical space, and provided with support and training in aspects of setting up and operating.

The future – a new model

By necessity, America's manufacturing and service industries must shift from mass to flexible production if they are to compete in a global economy.

As has been pointed out in **The double helix of education and the economy** (Berryman and Bailey 1992) American education has tended to organise itself along traditional industrial lines. Just as industry is recognising that it must change the manner in which it produces its goods and services, as well as the infrastructure that supports this production, so education must recognise that the delivery of its product can no longer follow the mass production model. Its infrastructure must change to produce the flexibility inherent in the continuously innovative system.

What does this concept mean for relationships between education and industry, and what are the fears in the minds of community college leaders as they attempt to respond to these changes?

1 Collaborations between industry and education must continue to increase. Neither party can survive in isolation.

Fears: Can the community college structure respond rapidly enough to meet industry needs? Do we understand how to form effective collaborations? Are we capable of looking beyond the immediacy of our crises?

2 The duality between academic and vocational education must be dissolved. The high skill jobs of the present and the future demand critical thinking, lifelong learning, communication, mathematical and technological skills, to name but a few. The theoretical and the applied must be integrated.

Fears: Can we adjust our curricular offerings fast enough to respond to this demand? Are our faculties (academic staff) prepared to teach both the content and the pedagogy for the future? Do we have the monetary resources to help develop our faculties?

3 The infrastructure of the community college must support the shift to greater flexibility.

Fears: Although the community college has been identified as the most flexible of all US educational entities, can we ensure greater flexibility? Do we know what type of infrastructure we need to establish? Can we break the bureaucratic model? Are we capable of engaging in the paradigm-shifting exercises that can unlock our thinking? Can we work through the tensions arising from our urgent and often conflicting needs?

4 Our educational delivery systems must keep pace with the flexibility demanded.

Fears: Can we garner the resources, both in terms of people and money, to deliver education through the most appropriate technological systems? Will we be cautious in our application of learning theory to technological delivery systems?

5 The education of community college personnel – faculty and administrators alike – must be consistent with changes occurring in our world.

Fears: Are our universities focused on the most appropriate curriculum for preparing community college leaders? Are community colleges seeking to help universities understand our needs?

In spite of these issues and fears, the prevailing attitude of community college leaders is positive. The perception and, hopefully, the reality are that community colleges have responded appropriately in the past. Even though our challenges seem greater for the future, we can and will meet them. Our successes may seem haltingly slow and fraught with pain and error, but successes they will be.

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Chapter 11: Urban colleges – success against all odds

Annette Zera
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What a college is like, what impression it makes, how people feel about it – indeed, what it actually does – are all functions of management style, history and the building stock, but more particularly of where it is. Colleges take on the colours of their environment, and the arrangements they make reflect the particular circumstances and features of their catchment area. Chapters 11 and 12 give accounts of two very different and very good colleges, one in relatively rural Wales, the other in decidedly urban Tower Hamlets. The college staff have basically the same objectives about providing educational opportunities, but the characteristics and the preoccupations of daily life are widely different. There are, of course, sharp variations in schools too, but because of the nature of the FE curriculum and its articulation with the world of work, the contrasts between colleges are stronger. Annette Zera's college would wither if transplanted, unchanged, to Wales: her clients are different and her service in consequence is also different.

Yet staff move about the system, seeking promotion or something else, and must adapt to their new environment. It says a lot for the resilience of educators that they can do so. Such movement of staff is necessary for the vitality of the whole system.

Described in these two chapters are the extremes; most colleges fit somewhere between the two. No two places will be the same, which may be one of the reasons why the sector has been so little understood. All encounters with colleges give a true picture, but only a partial one. Those people who compare their experiences are likely to find that they are rapidly at cross-purposes, hence the confusion.

All colleges are equal but some are more equal than others. Over the last few years a view has emerged that although college locations and situations vary enormously, they balance, and overall we all have problems of one kind or another. Colleges in inner city areas might think differently.

The conditions in the inner cities that gave birth to education priority areas and a plethora of initiatives in the 1970s and 80s are still with us in the 1990s. The single most significant change is the language now used to describe both the situation and the response by the state. In the past we talked about people who were disadvantaged or deprived. Now we talk about 'social exclusion' and an 'underclass', a word that is so completely negative it frightens. The names of the initiatives have changed too, from 'development' to 'challenge' (city), from 'aid' to 'task force' or 'action team'. The language suggests both a stark analysis and a determined response.

The language does not disguise the worsening of conditions and the centrality of inner city poverty. Inner cities are increasingly areas of extremes, of wealth and poverty, of the very young and the very old, of high levels of unemployment and the highly paid. Contrasts and contradictions are everywhere and nowhere clearer than in the area this college serves. Canary Wharf dwarfs the landscape, a symbol of faith in the city and the elusive regeneration of the economy. At the base of the Canary Wharf tower is the Isle of Dogs, one of the poorest and most divided communities in the country.

The volatile combination of race and poverty in the Isle of Dogs, and elsewhere, provides a breeding ground for racism and rough justice. In this context, there is no room for neutrality and colleges are seen as having roles to play in the local community which go beyond our remit as educators. Colleges are expected to be advocates, generators of role models, employers of local people. Equality of opportunity remains central to our business.

Colleges around the country have developed a range of strategies and initiatives to serve local communities in the inner cities. Of key importance to these are those that address limited access to educational opportunity and a history of educational failure.

Inner city colleges have put in place a range of access initiatives which open up services to the whole community. This college visits all 11–16 schools in the borough to talk individually to every pupil and sell the benefits of life at college. We accept every invitation that is offered to go out to meet community organisations, tenants' groups, youth clubs, to run stalls in markets and at community fairs – wherever, whenever. Inner city colleges go out to get their message across, and increasingly they ask people in through information units, advice sessions, open days and evenings.

The structure and timing of provision is changing with inner city working patterns; employment is increasingly on a shift, sessional and part-time basis. Similarly, twilight and evening provision has seen a significant downturn as local people, and particularly women, are reluctant to be out on the streets after dusk. The tension between exploiting the full capacity of college buildings and the demand for peak daytime provision is an issue many colleges are struggling to address.

The programme that is offered relates explicitly to local needs and has changed radically over the last few years with a huge expansion in learning support activities. The majority of students in this college take part in language and literacy workshops and a range of additional support sessions. We support a voluntary supplementary school which provides homework and revision classes. Without these initiatives, students would fail.

Students also risk failure because their financial circumstances interfere with their studies. Students lack money for the most basic essentials – to get the bus to college, to buy lunch, to buy a textbook. Many inner city colleges believe that lack of money is the single most important reason for students dropping out of college. This college, and many others, have to put time and effort into begging from local businesses and charities to provide emergency funds.

Poverty, the care in the community policy, wars in Somalia and elsewhere – these issues and others are creating a generation of students desperately needing practical and personal support in order to survive. This college employs large student service teams of advisers, counsellors and youth workers, all of whom work closely with tutors. These teams are not a luxury in an inner city college; they are part of the essential infrastructure which we need in order to deliver results.

How results are measured is a key issue for inner city colleges. Raw data comparisons are crude and seriously unhelpful in a context where only 17 per cent of the intake reach NVQ level II equivalence at the age of 16. It is vital to our future that systematic value-added measurement is introduced. At the moment we are competing with one arm tied behind our backs because it is just not possible to explain and market educational improvement adequately.

The competition in the inner city is fierce. Nowhere are the anomalies of the marketplace culture in education easier to see than in cities. Within a few miles radius in the majority of cities are several schools with sixth forms, a general FE college and at least one private training company. Almost certainly the images of these institutions will range from ghetto to glitz. One might be misled by the number and variety of providers into believing that there is customer choice and variety. After all, it is possible to take a bus ride or walk from one provider to another to compare the offer; but very few people actually do this. The inner city education market is in reality deeply segmented, based largely on class and race background. Customer choice is often a chimera of government. The range and variety of providers offers more opportunity for waste than choice.

What isn't wasted is talent, and there is plenty of it in inner city colleges. Students are increasingly well-prepared by schools, increasingly motivated (by the recession?) and increasingly realistic about their needs. Staff talk about choosing to work in the inner city because of the diversity and determination of our students. The motto of the student union of this college, 'SUCCESS AGAINST ALL ODDS', sums up how many of us feel. The 'family' of inner city colleges needs to assert its strength and character on the slopes of a very uneven playing field.

Chapter 12: Rural colleges

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Transport

The most obvious problem facing a rural college is transport. Lack of this essential service can drastically limit the effectiveness of any such institution. Buses can be in short supply, as they are also in demand for local school services. However, the revenue provided by services to schools and colleges makes it economically viable to run less profitable services for the benefit of the community. In a rural college it can be difficult, for example, to run a 10.00 – 3.00 course to suit married women, because of lack of transport. Buses may be plentiful in the morning and evening but infrequent during the middle of the day. Students may become dispirited by travelling long distances, especially 16 year olds who face a longer day than they have been used to in school. Drop-out may be a bigger problem than in an urban environment.

Problems arise with a lack of coherent timetabling across more than one bus company. One principal I know, together with the chairman and vice-chairman of governors, has spent time monitoring the situation at a bus depot between 8.00 am and 9.00 am to understand the problems students face when buses do not connect. Deregulation of transport has meant that students have to decide between bus passes from one company or another, and can only travel with that company. However, deregulation has provided some benefits. Different bus companies offer incentives for students to obtain bus passes from them (e.g. free travel at weekends to nearby cities). A rural college also has serious problems when there is snow. Classes are closed much earlier than in an urban area with much shorter distances to travel to college.

Course provision

Course provision is more a function of size than locality, in that a medium-sized rural college could have just as wide a range of courses as a similar sized urban college – perhaps even wider in order to cope with greater distances to the next available course. As most rural colleges are smaller than their urban counterparts, the usual methods of coping with small classes have to be implemented. Part-time day courses are combined for one day per week with full-time courses. Two year courses are run on a cyclical basis with part A this year, part B next year and so on. This enables first and second years of courses to be combined, so that a student could do A followed by B or alternatively B followed by A. This can only work effectively where courses can be divided into halves which are free-standing and do not depend on each other.

Courses are often in blocks of three hours, morning or afternoon, making combinations easier and travel more sensible. It may be more practical to provide short residential blocks of work if transport is difficult, rather than courses requiring attendance on one day a week. As there is little industry in rural areas, work experience is more difficult to organise.

Extra-curricular activities

Transport to and from college restricts and makes more rigid the student day. Therefore, extra-curricular activities are arranged at lunchtimes or on 'options afternoons'. To allow greatest participation, lunchtimes are usually fixed, although pressure on accommodation is tending to force staggering of lunchtimes with subsequent problems of attendance. The lack of social outlets often makes the college assume a greater importance in the social life of its students than could be the case in a busy urban area. In this regard the college plays a very important role in the community. In many areas the college is the largest employer and assumes the responsibilities which in other areas would be taken on by a large company. Societies exist for the local people as well as students. Events are arranged for senior citizens and other disadvantaged groups.

Staff recruitment

Recruitment of staff depends on the state of the economy and the availability of jobs elsewhere, so generally over the past 20 years there have been few problems in attracting highly qualified staff. In rural areas the cost of living and housing are far cheaper than in cities, and travel to work is much easier by car. There are few traffic and parking problems. Generally the life style is more attractive to the majority of people than an urban one. There is usually a lower turnover of staff, who are often in the older age range – halfway to the seaside and retirement! Staff have a much higher profile in the community than in a city college. As the college is often the only major employer in an area there are more married couples and other relatives on the staff than is usual, as other opportunities for work are restricted.

Progression

Students in rural colleges are not usually as streetwise as their town counterparts. On the whole they are better behaved and are more respectful to members of staff. There is a marked reluctance to move out of an area which often includes their extended family. Their choice of a higher education institution tends to be a local one. There is more development of franchised courses or 2+2 courses to cope with this reluctance to move away from home. As there is a more identifiable community spirit, local industry and the college co-operate to look after their own.

Overall, the advantages to students in their quality of life far outweigh the disadvantages of their travel problems.

Chapter 13: A new era for Scottish colleges

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Scotland is another country, and we almost certainly have not paid sufficient attention to some of the developments in technical and vocational education that have been going on there in recent years. They seem to do it faster and often better than we do south of the border.

As Michael Taylor says, the size of the system is an important factor: 43 colleges, the majority within easy reach of Glasgow and Edinburgh, makes for a high degree of coherence. In addition, the achievements of the Scottish secondary system bring much to admire and provide a strong base for high levels of participation (in 1992–93, 82 per cent of 16–17 year olds and 45 per cent of 17–18 year olds were in full-time study) and further qualification.

There has been strong development in Scotland in the FE curriculum, led or supported by the Scottish Office Education Department, and the Scottish Further Education Unit has made a major contribution to the vocational and training system.

Priorities in Scotland in 1994 are likely to be about the shape of a unitary system for vocational and academic provision, drawing on the best features of SCOTVEC and the SEB: more flexible programme design and delivery; guidance and learning support; core skills development; self-assessment and quality assurance. There is a strong indication that there will be a comprehensive credit system in place for young people and adults 'by the 1990s.'

We share a lot of preoccupations. We might do well to look harder at some of the Scottish models.

On the afternoon of Friday 26 March 1993 the principals of the Scottish further education colleges assembled in Edinburgh to listen to senior civil servants outline their responsibilities as accounting officers. In the evening they attended a reception held by Lord James Douglas-Hamilton, Minister for Education.

The events of 26 March reflect an important aspect of further education in Scotland. There are only 43 colleges and the majority of these are in the central belt. Communications are such that staff in the more distant colleges can attend a half-day meeting in Edinburgh or Glasgow. As a consequence, not only do all the principals know each other, but they all have contact with the small group of civil servants responsible for further education. Staff at the same level within different colleges are able to meet for afternoon sessions with SCOTVEC (the validating body for vocational qualifications) to consider changes in syllabi and other matters.

The size of the system provides considerable advantages in progressing towards corporate status, and one potentially considerable disadvantage. The advantages are the potential for the whole system to move in the same direction comparatively quickly with all the main decision-makers having the opportunity to participate in the process. This is a theme to which I will return several times. The potential disadvantage is the ease with which the system can become incestuous with college decision-makers becoming isolated from issues of similar concern in England and elsewhere in Europe. Even travel to London is expensive and time-consuming. It is not easy to find the time to attend meetings in the south, especially when there is so much on offer in Scotland. There is the danger of complacency. It is a long time since the early 1980s when the Scottish Office Education Department (SOED) Action Plan provided a modular framework of flexible, criteria-referenced vocational qualifications that were the envy of the rest of the UK.

The announcement that colleges across Great Britain were to become corporate bodies was made in 1991. The White Paper **Access and opportunity** (Scottish Office 1991), which considered the future of further education in Scotland, was very similar to the White Paper for England and Wales (**Education and training for the 21st century**, DES *et al.* 1991), and the main clauses concerning FE within the Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Act 1992 were broadly similar to those within the southern legislation. However, at the time of the government's announcement in the spring of 1991, Scottish colleges were at a different stage of their development. Legislation broadly similar to the provisions of the Education Reform Act 1988 was implemented a full year later in Scotland so that, at the time of the government's announcement, colleges had only recently begun operating the existing legislation. New college councils (similar to governing bodies in England) had been established from January 1991 and, in many cases, had met only once before learning that they were to be replaced in less than two years. Not having had the length of experience of operating under ERA legislation has meant that the learning curve in Scotland has had to be even steeper than in the south.

To its credit, SOED has implemented several strategies to make the development time as productive as possible. Firstly, it gave responsibility to the Scottish Further Education Unit to provide a series of staff development workshops, supported by quite outstanding publications on the major issues (e.g. facilities management, personnel policies) to be faced by colleges. (SFEU was formed in 1991, has a small core staff, buys in expertise as necessary and is primarily concerned with supporting vocational education.)

Secondly, SOED established four working groups comprising civil servants, local authority and college representatives to consider methodologies for managing revenue expenditure, capital and property, management information systems and staff development. In many cases these deliberations were linked with draft circulars from SOED which suggested the ways in which policy would be formulated (e.g. formula funding, provision for students with special educational needs, the structure of college development plans), but invited college comment. Often, SOED officials visited those colleges which replied to discuss the issues further. It is apparent from the changes in the final circulars that there has been genuine consultation, with the inevitable mutual confidence as a result. The SOED has not left responsibility for staff development and publications entirely to SFEU. It has produced support materials on financial management and development planning. It has commissioned consultants to visit each college to report to SOED and college principals on the college's financial systems.

Thirdly, SOED has addressed the need for colleges to have computerised management information systems to broadly similar specifications. A multi-million pound phased programme, involving £2 million in 1992–93 alone for capital expenditure on the system, will ensure that all colleges will capture (and be able to use) financial, estates, personnel and student records data in similar formats. Given the considerable variations in college starting points, this is no easy task.

Although the SOED has been less directly involved in establishing the Employers' Association, it has been sympathetic to it and will pump-prime it for its first years. Despite the fact that there has been widespread support for the concept of a single body which would develop a national strategy for salaries and conditions of service on behalf of all colleges, the road to agreement on the Association's constitution in March 1993 and subsequent recognition agreements with the teaching unions was a rocky one. There is now a small core staff of three, led by a Chief Executive; an executive committee comprising equal numbers of college principals and chairs of boards of management (which replaced college councils); and two sub-committees. One sub-committee advises on remuneration and conditions of service for principals and designated deputies, the other negotiates with respect to all other staff in the colleges.

I have made reference to the SOED plans for formula funding. There is a commitment to establishing a Funding Council for further education and, from 1994–95, to funding colleges on the basis of weighted student numbers and performance factors. In the first year of operation, college budgets have been based on historic budgets with colleges promised 'shadow' budgets later in the year. These will show what their budgets would have been if they had been based on the future formula.

While recognising the danger of generalisation, it is fair to suggest that further education in Scotland has moved into the new era confidently. Of course, there are fears of the unknown. However, there is confidence in the SOED, the Employers' Association appears to be effectively established, SFEU will continue to provide a support programme and the development of management information systems is continuing.

The issues that are high on the Scottish college agendas are not dissimilar from those elsewhere in Great Britain. We have similar concerns about the state of our buildings and how these might be made suitable for modern learning methodologies as well as attractive to potential students in a competitive environment. We are unsure about the extension of youth credits, the impact of the government's pay restraint policies, our future relationship with schools as they enjoy devolved management opportunities, and how we are going to increase student numbers while maintaining quality. In the last, as with so many other issues, the size and structure of Scotland provides advantages. The Scottish Education Department HM Inspectors' publication **Measuring up** (1990) laid down a framework of performance indicators which was followed up in 1992 by **Quality and efficiency** which, as its title might suggest, takes a wider approach to quality than the earlier publication. Five colleges have been operating a pilot, SOED-supported quality programme since 1991 with five further colleges joining in 1993 and five more in 1994. The dissemination of the work of the pilot colleges has ensured that the remainder are learning the lessons. In March 1993 the Scottish Quality Management System was launched jointly by Scottish Enterprise, Highlands and Islands Enterprise and SCOTVEC to ensure that all organisations involved in the delivery of vocational educational and training leading to awards will be working to a national quality framework.

Scottish colleges have entered the new era confidently. Our size and traditions outweigh the disadvantage of being on the geographical perimeter of Europe.

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Chapter 14: Human resource strategies in the new FE

Kate Anderson
National Audit Office

Of all the changes brought about by incorporation, taking responsibility for staff is probably the most significant. As Kate Anderson points out, their pay swallows up most of the budget, but that is not the end of it. The whole minefield of employment legislation, criss-crossed with equal opportunities practices, is now spread out before us. It is not just the big issues about redundancies, disputes, grievances and the like that loom up, but the smaller queries about pensions, increments and contractual interpretations. Our most expensive resource, and that by which we are best known outside the college, needs careful handling. We have had to establish personnel teams, develop policies for localised aspects of college life (e.g. split sites, idiosyncratic structures and inherited customs and practices). All this has been at a time of seismic unrest over new contracts and when the major teaching union has been deeply anxious about its future. No wonder Kate Anderson emphasises the need for 'good human resource policies'.

That staff are the most valuable resource in any organisation is an oft-repeated truism. Staffing costs certainly represent the largest item of expenditure in any college's budget. The challenge for colleges as employers is twofold: to make sure that money spent on the management and development of human resources constitutes a good investment and, by doing so, to develop a culture where staff feel they are a valued part of the organisation.

How, then, can colleges seek to respond to this dual challenge? The answer is by ensuring that their human resource strategies are well thought out and effectively implemented as an integral part of their strategic planning and development processes. Of course, the political backdrop to these issues cannot be ignored. The pressure within colleges to develop effective human resource strategies is matched by the pressure from outside. The government is keen to pursue such strategies as staff appraisal, performance-related pay and more flexible conditions of service in relation to FE staff.

This chapter will examine the characteristics of good human resource policies in FE within the context of overall strategic development, taking into account the external pressures upon colleges and their staff.

Human resource strategies – where do we start?

The question a college needs to ask itself in relation to its staff is: what kind of employer would we like to be? Does there have to be a choice between being a caring and enlightened employer on the one hand and achieving maximum efficiency from staff on the other? The answer is – not necessarily; but it is important to identify strategies for reconciling these two facets. College managers need to think through their approach to the following aspects of human resource management if their colleges are to become good employers:

- the management of the human resource function,
- staff planning,
- recruitment and selection,
- staff appraisal,
- staff development,
- reward structures,
- job evaluation/procedures for grading and regrading posts,
- employment relations.

Each of these aspects of human resource management has to be planned within the framework of a college's overall strategy. Such planning is part of an holistic approach to the management of functions to ensure that they are consistent with the mission of the college. Let us look at these aspects in turn.

The management of the human resource function

The key consideration here is that the responsibility for human resource management is given the priority reflecting its importance. A voice at senior management level is preferable and a well-developed infrastructure is essential. A number of different strands may be identified within the human resource function and it may be that different people have responsibility for each of these strands under the overall direction of a senior manager. The strands are: policy-making at senior management level, implementing policy in relation to personnel management procedures, implementing policy in relation to staff development and appraisal, managing employment relations.

Staff planning

Staff planning needs to take place at line manager level, within a clear set of guidelines drawn up as part of the overall human resource policy. The link between this process and the college's strategic development is very close. The development of new areas of work may call for new staff with specialised qualifications and experience, while decisions to stop offering non-viable courses may mean that staff in the area affected have to be retrained and redeployed or made redundant.

Selection and recruitment

The importance of good procedures for selection and recruitment cannot be overstated. Taking on a new member of staff is an expensive process with long-term implications. The time spent drafting accurate job descriptions and realistic person specifications is an essential part of the process and one which, if done with care, makes the identification of short-listing and appointment criteria relatively straightforward.

Those involved in selection and recruitment must be trained in the relevant techniques. In addition, all staff should be made aware of the procedures so that they are properly prepared should they ever wish to apply for a post as an internal candidate.

Staff appraisal

Many colleges already have in place a scheme for staff appraisal, based on a model agreed between employers and lecturers' unions in 1991. The focus of that model is a developmental one, with the emphasis on identifying individual staff development needs. The model has gained reasonably ready acceptance from staff, who have traditionally been hostile to the concept of appraisal.

If colleges implement recommendations to place all lecturing staff on four point scales within a spine of incremental points, it may be that the focus of the appraisal process will change and will shift instead to an evaluation of the job undertaken by a member of staff. In other words, appraisal may become the thing that staff have hitherto resisted: an objective assessment of a job and the way it is done. Similarly, if colleges choose to adopt the principle of performance-related pay, some form of appraisal will necessarily be a primary tool for deciding which staff 'deserve' their performance-related bonus and which do not.

Staff development

The ways in which funding for staff development has been made available have changed significantly in the last few years, from the days of relative plenty under the LEATGS (LEA training grants scheme) and GEST (Grants for education support and training) to the cold, hard assessment by colleges of the staff development that needs to be undertaken and how much or how little money to set aside for the purpose.

There are tensions here with those schemes for staff appraisal that have staff development as their primary focus. If staff go through a staff appraisal process predicated on identifying and fulfilling their development needs and subsequently discover that the funding is not available for those needs, there is every likelihood that the process will lose credibility next time around.

However, all colleges are well aware of external pressures on the curriculum which call for a complete re-appraisal of teaching and learning styles. Flexible learning, the accreditation of prior learning, developing and implementing NVQs and GNVQs are all developments that have necessitated a change of approach by lecturing staff. In some cases, funding for the required development has been available from bodies such as the TECs, the Further Education Unit or TEED for colleges, who have been able to bid for and secure a share of the monies available.

Attitudes to staff development need to be re-assessed in the new FE, by college managers and staff alike. On the one hand, staff development should be seen as an essential overhead, necessary to the continuing health of the college. The development of a research culture in colleges will strengthen this view. Enough money should be set aside from college budgets to ensure that all staff – academic and support – have access to relevant staff development opportunities. FE is changing so rapidly that it is imperative that staff are given the appropriate tools to enable them to continue doing a worthwhile job. On the other hand, new contracts will give academic staff in FE a precious commodity – time. The additional weeks in the new contract will provide time for research and time for staff and curriculum development. The majority of staff already make this commitment in what is at the moment their own time. New contracts will recognise that commitment and provide a framework within which all academic staff may undertake necessary development at times of the year when they are not teaching.

Reward structures

The new climate of professionalism in colleges demands a new approach to reward structures. A positive package of rewards needs to be presented to staff, particularly in the light of new contracts. The value of pension and sickness benefits needs to be expressed in monetary terms. Staff should be guaranteed access to appropriate professional development and training opportunities. Ensuring that staff work in pleasant, well-resourced teaching areas and workrooms is a further indicator of a college management's commitment to its staff. Finally, college management may like to consider the potential advantages of offering such benefits as subsidised restaurant facilities and health care schemes. In terms of motivating staff and ensuring morale is high, expenditure on such facilities may reap excellent returns.

Job evaluation

Colleges have fought shy of industrial job evaluation schemes for two reasons: first, the cost of the scheme itself when undertaken by an external consultant and, second, the fear that the outcome of implementing the consultant's recommendations will mean a significant increase to the payroll. However, some objective way of measuring people's jobs is required so that they may be accurately and equitably graded and remunerated.

There are two compelling reasons for implementing job evaluation schemes in colleges. The first is protective. Colleges are often large employers and have substantial workforces. It is relatively easy to envisage a situation in the not too distant future where colleges lay themselves open to challenges under equal pay legislation because they have employed two members of staff, one male and one female, to do the same or similar jobs at differing rates of pay. A job evaluation scheme which measured and graded each job in the organisation would reduce the chances of such a situation arising.

The second reason is that job evaluation schemes may be used to measure academic as well as support posts. When college managers decide to use four point scales when appointing academic staff, they need an objective means of differentiating posts at different levels. A scheme which measures the different kinds of responsibilities academic staff at different levels might be expected to undertake is an invaluable tool in helping colleges decide on the remuneration bands within which they wish to place posts.

Employment relations

The challenge in FE today is to create a positive staff culture, with staff who are professional, flexible, motivated and committed. Effective employment relations help to create a climate where staff feel that their views are heard and taken seriously. Each college sets up its own mechanisms for communicating with staff and their representatives. The most successful model is one where there are good channels of communication and staff have ready access to information about developments which may affect them.

In the past, it has often been the trade unions who have dictated what form employment relations should take. In the new FE, it is up to college managers to take the initiative and ensure that the messages staff receive about the college, its vision and its direction are those that engender a professional working environment. These, then, are some of the key considerations for colleges seeking to plan their human resource strategies. The increasingly competitive environment in which colleges exist means that all staff will be expected to work hard to ensure the college's long-term success. For their part, staff are entitled to expect their employers – the colleges – to play their part in designing human resource strategies which are imaginative and effective.

Chapter 15: Incorporation and the sixth form colleges

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Quite why sixth form colleges were included in the government's White Paper proposals for incorporation, and why they remained there in the eventual Further and Higher Education Act 1992, despite very fierce lobbying to be taken out, will probably not be clear until the documents struggle to the surface of our official secrets pile. It may have been an oversight covered up by obstinacy. In any event, they found themselves in the new sector, to widely reported forecasts of failure: too expensive, too small, too elitist, too narrow in their curriculum offering – the accusations were many. Geoff Higgins writes with some feeling about the sudden sense of exposure, and about the solutions agreed upon. Essentially, he says that if you cannot be sure of flourishing in the market, you rig it. Consortia for post-16 education are so obviously an option worth looking at, despite the almost universally bad track record of such arrangements, that Ashton's example may be one for others to follow.

The debate about whether sixth form colleges – a description that will surely seem increasingly anachronistic – should stick to their last and concentrate on A levels, or whether they should try to become what Geoff Higgins calls 'a small, increasingly established tertiary college of limited provision' has been echoed from Devon to Darlington, Cambridge to Cardiff. No consensus has emerged, or can be expected to do so.

Would sixth form colleges figure in the brave new world of incorporation or were the rumours correct that they would be removed from the proposals of the White Paper **Education and training for the 21st century** (DES *et al.* 1991)? Would the proposals survive the forthcoming general election anyway? If the future looked generally uncertain for the post-16 sector in the spring of 1991, then it was particularly so for sixth form colleges. Many possible scenarios were suggested but most colleges, unwilling to risk the wait and see approach and be found unprepared, decided to adopt a winning rugby adage and 'get their retaliation in first'.

In Ashton the first move towards preparation was made by the formation of a volunteer staff working group, chaired by the Principal but with deliberately limited senior management involvement and participation encouraged from all ranks of staff. The group, dubbed by the Principal with characteristic originality 'The 1993 group', set out to advise governors and senior managers of staff concerns relating to incorporation and to offer suggestions and advice on key topics and issues. The group's discussions had assumed that the new funding authorities would require evidence of the college's intentions and thus laid valuable foundations for the strategic plan eventually required of the college. Also produced was a working check list of relevant topics for the governors who were to steer the college in the new sector but who themselves shared the general uncertainty as to what would be required for future success.

Inevitably, early discussion concentrated on the two customary preoccupations of sixth form college planning, namely the curriculum and organisational structures. In fact, even the most rudimentary planning quickly exposed gaps, if not gaping holes, in other aspects of college management. Above all, more rigorous financial management and planning were quickly seen to be not only vital in the new context but incapable of being adequately delivered by the organisational and administrative structures possessed by most colleges. Those colleges which had already enjoyed substantial financial delegation under local management of schools schemes appeared to grasp the realities soonest.

Colleges like Ashton, which had been denied even this basic management experience, came later to the realisation that additional expertise was essential. A steady stream of advertisements for posts of finance directors showed that the gradual and successive dawning of reality was occurring throughout the sixth form college world. The fact that the advertisements were placed increasingly in accountancy journals rather than the traditional educational press also demonstrated the impact of the new thinking on colleges. The Funding Council's decision to inspect financial preparations by using a firm of leading accountants endorsed the decision which most colleges had taken, often with some reluctance.

Consideration of the curriculum illustrated well the dilemma created by incorporation. Since its opening, Ashton Sixth Form College had, due to a combination of national and local regulations, been prevented from offering places to adults and part-time students (many of whom had literally been turned away over the years) and from providing the vocational courses they so often sought. Now, suddenly, all such restrictions were removed at a stroke and a new freedom of action beckoned. Yet certain dangers quickly presented themselves as the crucial question of what exactly the college should offer in the new sector was considered.

Clearly, our plans could alienate other established local providers and produce damaging and wasteful competition. Similarly, in concentrating on new provision we could easily neglect our established strengths and lose the major pillars of our existing support. In a rush to provide everything to everybody it would be easy for us to become a small, uneasily established tertiary college of limited provision and restricted budget with no distinguishing special strength to offer. This would hardly have been a viable institution in the tough new sector and not really what was needed by the local or national communities. Consequently, there was never any doubt that the need to serve our existing clientèle well and maintain proven strengths would be paramount amongst Ashton's aims and the corporation duly gave significant weight to these requirements when adopting the college's mission statement. Hence, it was decided that rather than merely look for new courses we would seek ways in which we could offer our existing provision to a wider clientèle by adjustments to timetables and teaching methodologies. At the same time we should embrace the call for expansion from the Secretary of State by continuing our development of vocational provision and adopting areas of initiatives arising in vocationally orientated study, principally the newly piloted GNVQ.

Two useful offshoots arose from this debate. One was the added focus it gave to the evaluation of our buildings and premises which, as with so many sixth form colleges, had been built several decades ago with other educational purposes in mind. Planning future provision also meant that a far more strategic approach to premises management had to be adopted, thereby underlining the proactive role now required of the colleges in this sphere. Thus, the focus was on the need for particular types of rooms and buildings to enable the changes we envisaged to occur, replacing the previous vague thoughts of possible improvement. The second was that incorporation demanded that we review, far more thoroughly than had ever been necessary or possible before, the make-up of the present curricular provision and the skills of the staff *vis-à-vis* likely future needs. Crucially in each case, the responsibility for managing change was placed unambiguously in the college's remit; shadowy figures in the town hall could no longer serve as convenient recipients of blame for inaction or mismanagement.

The curricular debate further demanded that thorough consideration be given to our relations with our many educational partners and in particular our neighbouring college of further education and our sister sixth form college. Initial impressions of the legislation suggested that the formation of the new sector would see a sharpening of competition between post-16 providers as they sought to recruit ever-increasing numbers of students to provide the funds needed for survival. In fact, where previously well-disposed colleges existed in relatively close proximity, it became clear at an early stage that there was a great deal to be lost by damaging competition and the production of ever more expensive marketing ploys, quite apart from the fact that students were hardly likely to gain in terms of broadened or even sustained opportunities.

In an area like Tameside with a below average participation rate and strengthening but still improvable standards of attainment this was particularly true. Consequently, the colleges quickly got together to produce COTAS, the Colleges of Tameside Application System, a joint application procedure designed to help prospective students and to streamline college enrolment procedures. The natural consequence was to consider the production of a guidance booklet designed to raise student awareness of the opportunities available rather than extol one particular college. Additionally, regular meetings of the principals meant that policy was taken forward in a more concerted and open manner than at any time previously. Ashton Sixth Form College, for its part, enthusiastically embraced this approach. The college specifically made collaboration a major feature of its mission statement after the staff working group, the senior management team and the corporation itself had each advocated such a policy.

Nor were other partners forgotten, especially the high schools. The grant-maintained debate had produced a tense atmosphere in the area at the time leading up to incorporation and it would have been easy for the schools to suspect that the colleges were cutting themselves free of established relationships. To forestall this, the three colleges made it clear from the outset that they wished their working relationships to remain intact. Thus, for example, the colleges decided not to renegotiate their own TVEI contracts, as the earliest grant-maintained schools had often done, but instead chose to remain within the contract made with all schools and colleges in the authority, and to maintain their role as active participants in the local TVEI consortium. Similarly, the principals readily accepted an invitation to remain as associate members of the headteacher's group and heads of subject continued to contribute to the long-established curriculum networks.

Crucially, joint initiatives continued. Members of the science faculty at Ashton, for example, had launched working parties with some partner high school staff to produce 'bridging' materials for young people proceeding from year 11 to A level courses. This was in order to help transition both from GCSE content and methods to the less radical approaches still needed for A level, and from modular, integrated curricula to more traditional single science subjects. The outcome of this work was the production of agreed and tested curriculum support materials, which would then be disseminated throughout the local high schools, giving all year 11 pupils wishing to take A level sciences the chance of a flying start in their chosen subjects. This type of initiative was also aimed at reducing the so-called drop-out rate post-16, which so often stemmed from false expectations and consequent disillusionment in the early weeks of new courses. Senior staff at Ashton had come early to the realisation that while recruitment was the most important policy avenue to achievement of the expansion targets set by the Secretary of State and the Funding Council, retention was a vital factor to which the sector would need to pay closer attention. The publication of **Unfinished business** (Audit Commission/OFSTED 1993) at the very time of incorporation merely confirmed the imperative.

When the entry of sixth form colleges to the sector became definite, an overriding concern was voiced widely throughout the colleges. Sixth form colleges had always prided themselves, often publicly, on their distinctive ethos. This arose not merely from the high academic standards they exhibited but from the effective pastoral care they offered, the educational value of their extra-curricular and complementary programmes and the advantages rising from their relatively narrow focus, in terms of both course provision and age range of students.

At Ashton, for example, each student met their personal tutor every day, had focused careers and guidance education as an integral part of their programme, and could pick short courses from a wide range of options to enhance their main programmes. They could also involve themselves in a variety of opportunities in recreation, leisure or community service, both within and beyond the formal curriculum, throughout the year. They were also taught in groups of well-motivated students of similar age by highly qualified graduate teachers. This rich mixture had produced an education of real quality for young people and largely explained the flourishing support given by students and their parents to the sixth form colleges, shown in a massive increase in the numbers on roll throughout the 1980s; Ashton's roll had grown by some 70 per cent in the latter half of the decade.

As preparations began for incorporation, fears were openly expressed that this distinctive ethos was under threat from the new provision, which seemed based on a stark functionalism totally at odds with the principles espoused by sixth form colleges. Understandably, perhaps, this central concern became less frequently heard through the months before April 1993 as the urgency of planning and action demanded all the colleges' attention. It is the theme most likely to surface again, however, as unit costing and quality assessment become dominant themes in the scrutiny of the sector's work. Reorganisation of the sixth form colleges' main lobby group, APVIC, into an organisation more appropriately structured to the new sector (AVIC) indicates that the colleges intend to promote their conventional values with vigour and, if necessary, defend them with resolve.

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Chapter 16: Conclusions

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One of the things FE has always been best at is claiming to be well connected, especially to industry, commerce and the local benefit office, as well as quick to respond to changes. In fact, our record is at best mixed. We have tended to cling onto the familiar long after it needed to be replaced or updated. Day release provision is an obvious example of a pattern that has become cumbersome; industry/ college advisory committees are another. Since most of what is around us will change over the next decade, colleges will have to change too. It would be better to be anticipating and triggering change, rather than waiting for it to engulf us. Work will change, retirement age will change, the benefit system will change, as will examination assessment methods, educational technology and the expectations of our customers. This concluding chapter attempts to examine and forecast these changes, their impact upon colleges, and how they in turn will change.

In Britain we have had the industrial society, when we converted mainly imported raw materials into finished products. We have had – briefly and largely unsuccessfully – the skilled society, when we found that people in other countries were more skilled than us, and could turn out higher quality products at lower prices. Now, as Chris Hughes pointed out in his chapter, we are contemplating the knowledge society. The phrase is fine, the vision is a little unclear. It is expected to mean that key posts in the economy will be occupied by those with access to communications technology, who can manage and manipulate the information at their disposal. This will be true of all fields of economic, industrial and commercial endeavour. The knowledge workers may be supported by an outer network of contracted, bought-in providers of services, many of them part-time, many freelance, securing commissions according to their abilities and the phases of the market. Many more people will work from home, and in consequence companies will be smaller and less complex in their structure. An early example might be in the media industry, where small groups working together, often *ad hoc*, already provide services and products to the major broadcasting companies, publishing houses and industrial enterprises. To survive they occupy a niche, and stay ahead by the application of the latest technology.

The implication that colleges cannot ignore these changes is self-evident, but what is not so clear is what precisely they should do. We must stay close to employers – but which employers? We must redesign our courses, if the very word is not already outmoded, but how? Obviously, information technology must be part of everybody's programme, but we will also need to develop a range of new employment skills, whatever that means. Meanwhile, what will be the place of the specialist techniques of catering, motor vehicle studies, plumbing, health care and the rest? These jobs will still need to be done; it is their relationship to the core employment sector that will change, as well as the skills level required. Boil-in-the bag *cordon bleu* cookery is here, so is scrap-and-replace car component servicing. The process of job-simplification will gather speed. Colleges will have to rewrite their curriculum to keep up, or should it be down, with these developments. It will not be easy, not least because work is so heterogenous, as the chapters by Annette Zera and Bill Bleazard emphasised.

Accurate labour market intelligence about the present is hard enough to come by, and reliable forecasts about the intentions of small enterprises, many of them volatile in their performance, are non-existent. However, the task for colleges is not so much to know or second-guess local employment patterns as to think through the philosophical and organisational implications of constructing a curriculum which adequately reflects the way people work and which offers them appropriate support before and during their economically active careers.

The characteristics of a college which will be able to reflect and respond to the needs of its client group are becoming clear. The current cant word is 'flexible': what it means is customer-led, and customers will be more demanding. On the whole, colleges are still organised and structured in the interests of administrative convenience – common start and finish dates for courses, set levels for entry, rigid categories of students. That will all have to go. We shall be open and active all year round, just like all the commercial enterprises with which we shall be working. In many ways we will act like education shops, with a range of products and services designed and priced to satisfy our customers.

It will be a difficult transformation, accompanied by a lot of staff anxiety. We will have to stop drawing essentially meaningless distinctions between full- and part-time students. These are concepts whose useful life has long since passed. This is not least because when it is possible, even common, for a part-time student to spend more of each week in college, receiving more direct tuition than a full-timer, any original definition has become redundant. We will simply have students who will come for as long and as often as they need. We will need to find ways to record their attendance and claim the resources to which they entitle us – demand-led, not supply side. Such a way of working will mean a degree of unpredictability in the college's activities. Managing this amounts mainly to managing staff. Teachers will have to be prepared to work longer hours at short notice at certain times of the year, in return for quieter times at other periods. That will be an uncomfortable transition for those who come into it expecting set hours, set holidays and even rhythms of work.

The new contracts now being introduced offer a lot more opportunity for managers to deploy teaching staff more flexibly, but from the staff perspective it looks like a lot more work for no more money. The solution must lie in some form of case-loading. Teachers should be professionals, like doctors, able and authorised to take responsibility for an agreed number of students, or student hours, over a year. Just as a doctor will decide when and whether their patient needs to be seen, or what treatment is appropriate, a teacher should be able to be trusted to oversee a student's progress towards an agreed qualification or other outcome. How much direct teaching, how much private study, what sort of work experience, etc., would become matters of professional judgement. The pattern would vary from student to student, and at different times of the year.

Just as the distinction between kinds of student should disappear, so also should the separation between full- and part-time staff. Individual contracts are needed, so that some teachers might be free from college commitments during school holidays, others might be available mornings only, or throughout the year. Employment rights would need to be protected, of course, but we ought to be able to agree contracts that recognise that the needs of individuals and those of the college will vary from person to person, and from year to year.

With a seamless operating year, and teaching staff on flexible contracts, colleges will be very different from now, but the changes will not stop there. As the post-16 participation rate rises to more respectable international levels, the significance of GCSE will diminish and perhaps disappear in favour of reliance on records of achievement. That would on the whole be a good thing, successful though GCSE has been in raising both standards and students' expectations of themselves. We are still, and increasingly, in an over-certificated system. The costs of assessment, moderation, examinations and certification astonishingly but customarily exceed the amount colleges spend on books and other learning materials.

We are buyers of services in a sellers' market. It may well be that colleges will offer their own qualifications in future, licensed to do so by the gatekeepers of BTEC, City and Guilds and the rest. It would be simpler, cheaper and a confirmation of the more independent status of colleges. We could also do it at times which suited our own students, rather than those defined by bureaucratic boards. Employers, HE, and students themselves would soon learn the relative rigour and respectability of the qualifications offered.

Colleges are already making use of the opportunities presented by incorporation to redefine teaching. In reality the term has always been vague and teachers have had administrative and reporting responsibilities which would amaze their US counterparts. The development of new learning styles through using banks of open-access computers, workshop style clinics for remedial tuition, drop-in centres for such things as keyboarding skills, along with the development of extensive counselling and support services have raised questions about what the limits of teachers' jobs should be. It is not just that teachers are expensive (although relatively they are), but it may be that they are not very good at these new relationships with students, or very interested in gaining the skills required.

Accordingly, colleges have begun appointing advisers, learning support officers, demonstrators and even – a term of mythical horror for the lecturers' union – instructors. While conditions of service for such employees are so different from those of lecturers, these appointments will multiply. However, the true craft of teaching, a highly professional and subtle skill, will always be at the centre of the teacher/learner nexus, and is not at risk of extinction. Other specialists will be appointed to support the teacher in what he or she does best, and relieve him or her from the other bits. In this way the staff profile will alter to reflect the self-evident: staff cannot simply be categorised as teaching and non-teaching. There is a multiplicity of ways in which the student is welcomed, counselled, inducted, taught, supported and guided to the exit phase of their programme.

The management of staff – all of them – has been changed by incorporation. From being proxies for the local education authority, corporations – acting through the principal – are now the employer. New personnel codes, many of them starting from the view that all employees should be treated equally, have been developed very quickly. The first colleges have already been awarded the status of Investors in People, a convenient benchmark for good employment policies. Just as colleges compete to enrol students, they will want to outbid each other in securing the best staff. IIP status will no doubt become a minimum, to which ambitious colleges will want to add other proof of how good they are to work in. Free private health insurance, leased cars and club memberships have already arrived. Stand by for bonus schemes offering holidays, discounted mortgages and Christmas hampers. It's all a long way from free chalk and a key to the bike shed.

New-style contracts for staff will be matched by some form of contract with students. The Department for Education has produced **The charter for further education**, headed 'further choice and quality' (DfE 1993), and colleges are required to develop a local, specific one. Some colleges have had something similar in place for a number of years. Contracts are not, I believe, intended to limit the college/student relationship, but to clarify it. It must be right for customers of our services to know what to expect from us, and what is expected of them in return. Without some sort of contract, or service level agreement, customers have to take us wholly on trust, have no clear grounds for any complaint, and may well expect too little of us. Contracts change the nature of the college/student axis: from donor/recipient to a partnership. That change needs managing.

A lot of things will flow from the development of new-style colleges as I have described them. Probably the key change, or point of progression for colleges already moving in this direction, is the establishment of a sense of community ownership. From being a large, unaccountable, mysterious institution located physically but not conceptually in a community, good colleges will come to be seen as a local resource, an agent for benefit, a generator of a quality service. That service will go beyond the provision of education and training. Like the best of their American counterparts, and like the more far-sighted British colleges even now, they will open up their facilities to local groups, extend access to the reference sections of their libraries to local individuals, organise concerts, put on public debates on issues of local or regional significance, mount exhibitions, campaigns and civic events. The power of the collective expertise of the staff and the availability of the facilities will be directed to enabling and empowering those who pay for the college through their taxes. Going to the college will become as natural as going to the sports centre. The days when signs on college gates used to say 'Trespassers will be enrolled' have gone, though they have not yet been replaced by 'Trespassers will be welcome', but at least one college includes in its mission statement 'The college is yours, even if you have never used it'.

Incorporation produced a pattern of quasi-independent colleges which was at once seen to be distorted and dysfunctional. There were, and still are, too many colleges in the wrong places. Colleges had been established over a period of a century or more, during which time local government has been re-organised more than once. For example, municipal authorities with their own college have been swept up into larger, county-wide authorities with their own pattern of provision; population shifts have taken place out of the inner cities into the suburbs or the country; industries and companies with an interdependent relationship with a college have collapsed. The first mergers have already taken place and more will follow. In particular the sort of post-16 rationalisation which led to tertiary colleges in the 1970s and 80s, but which slowed or was halted by the opt-out of schools, will undoubtedly be brought back by market forces. Economies of scale, converging post-16 curricula, and a rapprochement of conditions of service for teachers will all exert a pressure for collaboration, co-operation and eventual conjoining. Hostile take-overs are, for the moment, ruled out.

There is no reason why mergers should only be between neighbouring institutions: commercial companies operate perfectly happily with a pattern of local branches within a national or regional organisation. It may well be that colleges which have worked together on a range of projects have done so precisely because they are not in close competition, and a series of mergers to form a consortium may well be an attractive proposition to save costs, present a powerful corporate image, and engage in aggressive marketing of its services. In particular, this may appeal to colleges with an international dimension to their work.

The idea of a little corner-shop college operating internationally would have been absurd only a few years ago, but colleges are now large employers, often the largest in the locality, and have annual budgets running into many millions of pounds. Just as alert companies market their goods and services abroad, so do some colleges. A smattering of overseas students from outside the EU bring in good fee income. The English language is a non-wasting asset which can be exploited, and consultancies are available to advise on technical education and training in upwardly mobile parts of the world. Some staff welcome the chance to strut their stuff in Sofia or Siberia; it makes a change from the routine at home. Properly organised, it can be a very valuable, and cheap, exercise in professional development. It can also be justified on the grounds that many of our students will spend at least part of their working lives in another country, so that contact with overseas exchange teachers, and students, and to home-grown lecturers who have international experience on which they can draw is in itself useful.

Swapping experiences, avoiding re-invention of the wheel and sidestepping known mistakes are good reasons for learning from other systems. Cheap airfares help the process. Conferences of, for example, the Association of American Community Colleges are thick with British FE managers. In the future, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa – to mention only those areas from which we are divided by a common language – will offer examples from which sensitive college managers will learn and we will, of course, have things to offer them too.

Within the EU, free movement of labour has not yet brought about the flow of qualified teachers across the vanishing frontiers, but it must come. Colleges along the south coast are already contracting with French companies for building, maintenance and cleaning work. Where brickies lead, can teachers be far behind?

Native speakers of European languages will surely become the norm, as more of our EFL trained graduates take off to Paris, Madrid and Rome.

Regionalism is rising on the agendas of all our main political parties. The FEFC has a regional structure, so has the Association for Colleges which has been established to provide a professional support and lobbying function for the sector. It may well be that the FEFC regional offices, whose role and effectiveness remain to be established, will assume greater powers. The most plausible scenario runs like this. Distinctions between FE and HE are clearly anomalous, both in terms of definition and funding. Colleges are responding to demands for local HE from those who will never wish or be able to travel to another town to attend a university. This new work will be, indeed is, being franchised or validated by a university. This trend will accelerate, despite current difficulties – in fact this will be the only way for the government's targets for HE to be reached.

At some point in this process, logic will determine that the separate funding councils for further and higher education should merge. Such a body would be unwieldy, and perhaps too powerful, so it will consequently be split into regional funding councils (plus one each for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland), whose role will be to serve all post-compulsory provision required in the region. Rationality at last, except that school sixth forms would be left in a curious limbo. How many school sixth forms will or should survive far into the future is another question. If they did not exist there would not be a strong case for inventing them. Perhaps the solution would be for the beefed-up regional funding councils which I have envisaged to fund them too, against the same criteria for cost-effectiveness as the college sector. FE colleges are well used to multiple sources of funding and it would not be asking too much of schools to do the same if they wanted to bid for post-compulsory provision.

Colleges are sometimes described, loosely and inaccurately, as businesses. The essence of a business, however, is that you determine your product, control your costs and set your prices. You are responsible, in other words, for your own business plan. Colleges are not really like that – or not yet. An average 75 per cent of college costs go on staffing. Pay rates are determined nationally, not locally. Most FE colleges have joined the Colleges' Employers' Forum and most sixth form colleges have signed up to their own equivalent (AVIC). This saves the costs and hassle of plant bargaining, but it yields control of our most significant cost. The majority of our 'prices' are set too. The Funding Council determines how much they will give us per student, or per unit as it will be, and the local education authority continues to decree how much we may charge for the adult education that they buy from us. Colleges with HE programmes have to accept the fee levels that the Department for Education decides. There is little room for manoeuvre then, on costs or prices.

The elements in our business plans are also heavily influenced by others, in particular by the National Targets for Education and Training which set out our agenda until the millennium. They are challenging targets, and if as a nation we achieve them, the damaging skills gap between us and our competitors will have been narrowed, and the college sector will have worked most of the miracle. Only through the college system, making use of the sort of flexibility I have referred to, will mature students contribute to the lifetime targets and younger students contribute, predominantly, to foundation targets. These targets will be the priorities of the Training and Enterprise Councils, student achievements will be encouraged by the FEFC funding methods, and our strategic plans will be significantly shaped by the pressure applied by these two bodies. Free-standing, independent businesses we are not.

Free-standing independent businesses dominate the TECs. Board members have to be senior executives of companies, so that training and enterprise are necessarily given the importance they deserve – or that at least is the theory. Reviews of the operation of TECs show a patchy picture at best: as with colleges and their boards, TECs are dependent for their success upon the energy, vision and determination of their permanent staff, to which the part-time, public-spirited board members contribute strategic direction and respectable gravitas. The TECs' success in fostering a training culture and in persuading companies to invest in their staff has been made harder to achieve by the long recession. It has also been made harder by the requirement for them to take responsibility for both the youth and adult training programmes of the government. This has left limited opportunity for them to develop or encourage provision for lifelong, continuing training for those with jobs. Whether TECs represent the last word on how adequate training for national purposes can be secured will emerge with time and as the fashion for market solutions is tested by experience.

TECs are of particular interest to colleges, not just as commissioners of training and sometimes (regrettably) as providers too, but because a significant part of the college budget has to pass through TEC hands before it gets into the college account. This work-related further education money, as it is clumsily called, has to be accounted for to the TEC, who require to see how it will be spent before releasing it. The process is time-consuming and, from the college perspective, irritating. We are required to demonstrate that the funds will be used in ways that benefit local industry and commerce through the provision of relevant vocational activities. But what do they think we do, if not vocationally relevant activities?

The whole FE curriculum is based upon the intention to match our activities to the needs of students who either are or will be at work.

As planning in FE becomes more sophisticated and we are able to draw upon better information bases to predict demand and supply more accurately, our strategic forecasts will be increasingly valuable to others. They will be expensive for us to produce. As things stand now, the local TEC has a seat as of right on the board of the college corporation, with full access to our business plans. It could be argued that membership of the college's board gives the TEC adequate opportunity to influence the plans and proposals if such influence is needed to ensure local vocational relevance. This could be done without requiring colleges to replicate parts of their planning process in a separate application to the TEC to release the funds, which are earmarked for FE in any case. This is leaving aside the issue of whether or not it is ethical for a member of a competing training provider, which some TECs are, to have such privileged information.

The reason why TECs and colleges fall over each other's feet is that we have two government departments involved, responsible for education on the one hand and training on the other. So we have confusion at national level, replicated locally. We have let history dictate the present rather than inform it. The same difficulties undermine the relationship between the FE service and the benefit system, which is the responsibility of the Department for Social Security. While we are busy devising and marketing courses for mature students to come back to education, unsurprisingly, the benefit system designed for other purposes than to support such students inhibits them by imposing constraints upon how many hours they may study, and what they may study. Would-be students are alienated by a process that leaves a great deal for interpretation at branch benefit office level. Different offices take a different view about what constitutes attendance (Does it include private study, or not?). They have varying interpretations of vocational work (Does it have an examination at the end? Is it in some way work-related?). They also query to what extent is the would-be student genuinely available for work, which is a condition of continued payment of benefit.

What we need, and surely will one day have, is a notion of universal entitlement to an amount of post-compulsory education. It may be in the form of a training/education voucher which can be cashed wholly or partly at any time convenient to the student. It may be in the form of an extension of the right to free education, which will be extended beyond the age of 19 for certain kinds of course. The contents of the FEFC's Schedule 2 is an appropriate starting point. Or it could be that educational loans repayable through the tax system will be available for courses of all kinds, not just higher education as at present. We will certainly need something more like what is available in parts of America, where entitlement to benefit depends upon willingness to take a course at the local college. One way or another, the pursuit of a suitable qualification must be reckoned an investment in the future, and should be supported, rather than an indulgence which must be discouraged.

The possible future scenario is a beguiling one, with colleges clearly located in the heart of their community, looked on with admiration or respect as powerful agents for beneficial change. They would be open and welcoming to every individual or group, all year and all day. They would provide ways in, progression through and ways out. They would be models of cost-effectiveness, efficiency and transparent accountability, and they would take the lead in matters of public concern, from equal opportunities to a new motorway proposal, from environmental awareness to local government reorganisation. We would all salute that flag but we are, of course, still miles away from the vision. In October 1993 the Council for Industry and Higher Education produced a report called **Changing colleges: further education in the market place** (Smithers and Robinson). This revealed, or rather confirmed, the lack of understanding by industrialists of the role or even the potential role of colleges in the revival of the economy. For industrialists, read also politicians, newspaper editors and civil servants.

The means of getting from here to there, from obscurity to recognition, lie in the hands of college managers. The Association for Colleges will help, no doubt of that, but it is for managers to bring about the cultural changes required in colleges, to foster openness, responsiveness and – crucially – confidence. We are responsible for an immense asset of almost limitless potential. We have no acceptable reason for failure.

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Appendix: Acronyms used in the text

ACS	Average class size
ALH	Average lecturer hours
APL	Accreditation of Prior Learning
APVIC	Association of Principals of VI Form Colleges (became AVIC in 1993)
AVIC	Association of VI Form Colleges
BTEC	Business and Technical Education Council
CAT	Credit accumulation and transfer
CBI	Confederation of British Industry
CET	(Lucas) Continuing Education and Training
CIHE	Council for Industry and Higher Education
CPVE	Certificate of Pre-Vocational Education
CTCs	City Technology Colleges
DES	Department of Education and Science (now DfE)
DfE	Department for Education
EDAP	(Ford) Employee Development Assistance Programme
EFL	English as a foreign language
ERA	Education Reform Act 1988
EU	European Union
FE	Further education
FEFC	Further Education Funding Council
FEU	Further Education Unit
FHE	Further and higher education
FTE	Full-time equivalent
GDP	Gross domestic product
GEST	Grants for education support and training
GNVQ	General National Vocational Qualification
HE	Higher education
HEQC	Higher Education Quality Council
IIP	Investors In People
IT	Information technology
LEA	Local education authority

LEATGS	LEA training grants scheme (replaced by GEST)
LECs	Local Enterprise Companies
MSC	Manpower Services Commission (now TEED)
NCVQ	National Council for Vocational Qualifications
NEC	National Exhibition Centre
NTETs	National Targets for Education and Training
NVQ	National Vocational Qualification
OCNs	Open College Networks
OFSTED	Office for Standards in Education
PCAS	Polytechnics Central Admissions System (now UCAS)
REAL	Rover Employee Assisted Learning
SCAA	Schools Curriculum and Assessment Authority
SCOTVEC	Scottish Vocational Education Council
SCUE	Standing Conference for University Entrance
SEB	Scottish Examination Board
SED	Scottish Education Department (changed name to SOED)
SFEU	Scottish Further Education Unit
SOED	Scottish Office Education Department
SSR	Staff: student ratio
TAC	Tariff Advisory Committee
TECs	Training and Enterprise Councils
TEED	Training, Enterprise and Education Directorate (of Employment Department)
TUC	Trade Union Council
TVEI	Technical and Vocational Education Initiative
UCAS	Universities and Colleges Admissions Service
VET	Vocational Education and Training
YTS	Youth Training Scheme

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Further

Editors: Colin Flint and Michael Austin

Britain urgently needs an education system that enables success for much higher proportions of its population. Participation rates post-16 continue to rise; ambitious national targets are set and widely accepted. But our educational culture remains one in which patterns of aspiration and achievement owe more to class and geography than equality of opportunity.

The creation of a newly defined further education sector and new national regulations for finance and governance of colleges is a major step towards higher levels of achievement. Colleges are at the heart of the emerging system – the pivotal point between schools, higher education and industry. They can become the engine for effective investment in education and training and, hence, for economic development.

But what are the central purposes of FE? What are its values? How will it meet the needs of diverse learners? Can we create a rational marketplace for public sector college education? Do we understand the implications of a mass, high quality, high achievement, post compulsory system? This volume of essays does not claim to offer definitive answers, but its authors are confident that further education will provide them if it is allowed to do so.

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